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"Stand up, dearest. Mr. Vail remembers me, I dare say, at your age."

MY MOTHER'S ENEMY.

A STORY FOR GIRLS.

BY

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TO

E. A. W.

WITH GRATITUDE AND LOVE.

MY MOTHER'S ENEMY.

CHAPTER I.

MR. VAIL'S ADVICE.

THE "story" part of my life always seems to me to have begun on a certain spring day in a lawyer's office in England, where I can see myself, a girl of fifteen, seated in a remote window while my mother and a thin little old gentleman with kind eyes were discussing business matters at a table which formed the central object in the room.

Bits of their talk reached me easily and directed my attention from the objects in the quaint old High Street of the town, which I could see below Mr. Vail's window. Mother was telling this friend of her girlhood what had brought us to England—how she had not intended to remain, but that as it seemed imperative now for her to take a long journey she wished to place me somewhere quietly in the country for six weeks or, it might be, two months.

These facts alone would have sufficed to keep my attention, but the interest lay in deeper causes. My mother, I knew, was English born and bred; yet in all the years of our close companionship since my father's death — companionship such as a young mother and her only child who live nearly alone can have—she had rarely told me any thing of the

story of her early life. The few tales, related more because of some unexpected suggestion in passing events, borrowed much of their charm from the very fact of her general reticence about England and her relations there; but now it appeared to my alert young senses as though the vague outlines might be filling up; gaps which had puzzled me in the tales she had told me might be drawn together by the very course of our wanderings—if we had any—and the people we should meet; and even this dingy office on the High Street of Hilford, even the little old gentleman who asked more questions than he gave information, seemed to possess a distinctly attractive importance of their own, and I felt—light-hearted, wholesome girl that I was—as if I were absorbing the elements of a romance.

In and out of the conversation had come friendly questions as to mother's life in America. The uneventful but happy years of our life together, and which, so far as my memory reached, had been passed in a New England town, a prosperous, comfortable sort of place, encompassed by fine hills and with various thriving industries and noted for its "Young Ladies' Seminary," where my mother was one of the principal teachers and I a pupil, ever since I could remember. Our circumstances were fairly comfortable, though never luxurious, and I grew up having more of my mother's companionship than many girls whose mothers have full leisure; and we were privileged persons, I now think, enjoying a kind of freedom which made the school like our own home. In spite of some enforced economies we had two rooms for what mother called a "place" quite

to ourselves, and her exquisite sense of order and artistic taste had given them an indefinable air which made them unlike any other portion of the large, rambling old house, which, as I remember it in those days of long ago, was primly, rigidly conventional. Mother's ingenuity went far enough to create so charming a little sitting-room that the principal was given to bringing strangers there sometimes—too often for our convenience—but looking back now I see that Mrs. Flower was nothing loth to introduce to visitors her very distinguished looking and highly bred "English teacher," while they were apt, of an afternoon, to linger for the cup of tea which, true to her early habits, my mother always made at four o'clock, *brewing* not boiling it, under a cosey, and serving it daintily in the pretty blue and white china which was one of the earliest associations in my mind with our little parlor sideboard.

How eagerly the girls sought for an invitation to "Mrs. Glenn's room!" and not one but felt herself honored by such an attention and cheered or comforted or encouraged by a talk with her; for, in spite of a tinge of something almost melancholy in her expression, I am sure my mother was to every one a most charming companion, with that indescribable touch of magnetism in her nature and manner which is too subtle to be defined but so quick and happy in its influence.

Among my mother's favorite pupils were the daughters of an American gentleman, a widower who had been engaged for six months in Russia on some civil-engineering work. Mary and Stella Hill had won my mother's sympathy and

attention at first from their overpowering homesickness; and when the first flush of their misery was over she discovered that they were really charming girls, well bred, gentle and quite clever enough to suit her ideas of what a school girl ought to be in class; so they were allowed to attach themselves to her in a way which might have made some daughters jealous; but such an idea would have struck me as an absurdity! The idea of *any* girl usurping one tiniest fiber of *my* place! No such question ever arose, I rejoice to say, to cloud the absolute trust that existed between my mother and myself. Mr. Hill was expected home in April. Instead of this came news of his detention at St. Petersburg for another year, and a letter couched in the strongest terms, asking my mother to bring his daughters to England, where he would meet them. To extend the journey just then was out of the question for him. I wonder now, looking back, just what influenced my mother to accede to this unexpected request, for it involved her taking a holiday at a most inopportune moment and placing some one else in the school to fill her class duty. Possibly the strivings of a desire at least to *see* her native country were undercurrent and stronger than she knew, and in any case the doctor had long since recommended a change and suggested a sea voyage. At all events her decision was quickly made, and three weeks later saw us in Hilford, an unlooked for emergency having made it necessary for my mother to continue her journey with the Hills, and meantime dispose of me in some suitable fashion. Mr. Hill, at the last moment, had found it impossible to leave St. Petersburg,

and there was nothing for mother to do but escort the girls to Russia, and place them safely in their father's care, an arrangement which suited them admirably, while, in spite of a pang at the thought of her leaving me, I could not help being delighted by the prospect of a few weeks in England.

"I must count on at least six weeks absence," my mother was saying, "and as you—know every thing—dear Mr. Vail, I felt sure you would be the best one to advise me as to where Helen could remain in my absence. I could trust my little girl to whomever you recommended."

Mr. Vail's considerations and discussions with mother on this point had finally resulted in two propositions—one that I should remain with his sister and himself, the invitation most cordially given and with reference to "old times;" the other that I should go down to a place in the country called "Britton Marsh," where a client of his took two or three girls of my age to board and teach.

"It is really fortunate, I think," said Mr. Vail, with a kindly glance in my direction, "that you have brought your daughter with you."

"O, I could not bear to leave her," answered mother, smiling. "And, after all, I am glad she will see something of England."

"Ah, I thought so!" he exclaimed. "I feel sure in your heart you meant to stay awhile, and then, when you return, you must try to renew some of your old friendships. It is sixteen years since—" he broke off suddenly, warned by a glance from my mother. Her blue eyes seemed to express a "No," and her fair, delicate face flushed almost pain-

fully. "Helen" and "knows nothing of it," reached me from the next whispered sentence, and I felt myself confused and perplexed, but presently Mr. Vail's cheery accents sounded in a higher key.

"Well, well, I'm glad you care something for your country, any way. And now you'll go off and come back from Russia brighter and stronger."

"O, stronger!" interrupted mother with her pretty laugh. "I am always strong enough. I tell that tall girl of mine I had never had rosy cheeks such as she has! It wasn't natural to me. And she is taller than I am now. Stand up, dearest. Mr. Vail remembers me, I dare say, at your age."

"Yes, yes," murmured the old man, adjusting his spectacles as we laughingly stood before him, and I can see now the reflection of our two figures—mother and daughter—which the tall, narrow mirror on a wall across the room gave back. My mother, so fair and youthful-looking for her eight and thirty years—a slender little figure, always wearing black but in exquisite quiet taste; a face nearly perfect in outline and finish, the eyes deep, "gentian" blue, as the girls at school used to declare, and shaded by gold-colored lashes; the hair a perfect golden, save where some lines of silver touched it. But with all that was undeniably beauty there was something about my mother, something which it would seem the sorrow from God's hand had stamped upon her, which set her apart from all demonstrative admiration. No one ever thought of paying her the kind of careless compliments which any merely "pretty" woman

generally receives. No one ever suggested her altering the simplicity of her mourning dress because this or that or the other would be "becoming" or was "fashionable." My mother's beauty, I think now, had a sort of sanctity about it which made such intrusion impossible, and yet I, her careless young daughter, used to wonder about it and believe that it had always been so; that my mother never could have known the harmless vanities or satisfactions of blooming youth—and who would have fancied *me* her daughter!

Let me tell you what I remember of the other figure in the mirror. A tall girl, with vitality, good spirits and lightheartedness in every line of her smiling face; not a beautiful face, then or ever, but with the charm of youth and the joyousness of an untried future giving the eyes their look of happy and yet perhaps a trifle wistful expectancy. Brown eyes, not a bit of "gentian" in them. A fairly good nose and a rosy mouth, not very small, but showing fine white teeth, and the hair which coiled about my head in heavy braids was nut-brown, and just—to my distress—tinged with red.

"We must be off now," said mother, moving suddenly, so that the picture before me was dissolved. "Helen and I have just this one day together, and I am going to take her for a ramble. Then, if you will leave the two offers open, dear Mr. Vail, we will come back, as you kindly suggested, for luncheon with you and your sister, and I will decide what to do with my—big baby here!"

So it was settled. Mr. Vail accompanied us to the door, directing us how to find the old castle of the town, among

whose ruins we meant to sit down for a time while mother told me the story of the place, and we passed out into the sunny old street, conscious that this was our last day together for weeks and yet bent on making a genuine holiday of it.

CHAPTER II.

HILFORD CASTLE.

THE "High Street" of the old town was crowded when mother and I went out into it, and I enjoyed observing all that was novel and picturesque in the people and objects about me; for it was market day, and farmers from all the neighboring villages had come in, their carts well laden, and generally presided over by some feminine members of the family. A buxom matron in her best gown and gayest bonnet and shawl, perched high on the "box seat," or a blooming maiden whose wide-open eyes traveled up and down the street, eager to take in every evidence of "town" life or exhibition of town manners and styles, perhaps to report or imitate them, as the case might be, on returning home again. The farmers not infrequently walked beside their carts, well dressed in corduroy or homespun, and presenting fine, weather-beaten countenances, as a rule good-humored and healthy, while there were plenty of boys to be seen in smock-frocks and broad-brimmed hats, and occasionally old men similarly attired, while here and there a group of purchasers or a gig-load of people marked the upper class of farming or trades-people, but all with a certain mingling of holiday and business aspect which gave the town an air of importance, half festive and half solidly prosperous. "Market dinners" were advertised at various inns, and it

was evident were in process of cooking, from the savory odors which reached us as we made our way past some of the smaller inns or hostelries, one of which was quaint enough in architecture and casements to have stood just where it did, on a corner near the Town Cross, since the days of the Protector. We had a little shopping to do, and selected one of the principal shops in the High Street, mother lingering over the purchases lovingly, since they were for me, and doubtless reflecting somewhat ruefully, as I did myself, that for the first time in my life I would be away from her when I first wore the dress and gloves and pretty jacket she was selecting. I was delighted and soon engrossed by a dressing-case, very much such a one, mother said, as she had when a girl, and the stocking of it was a fascinating employment, mother enjoying it, she said, quite as much as I did myself, and choosing pretty although inexpensive articles.

"Now then," she said, linking her arm in mine as we left the shop after concluding this last purchase, "let us take a nice walk. Come, Helen, we will explore the old ruins."

The "keep" of the old castle of Hilford crested the ridge of an eminence scarcely to be called a hill, and yet which gave us, when we left the thoroughfares of the town, a little climb. When we entered the grand, although half-ruined, archway forming the entrance to the keep, we were glad to sit down for a few moments any way before exploring the ruined chambers, whose floors were now of grass and weeds, yet within which the flower of English beauty and chivalry had once bloomed and, alas! too often in those old days, languished and died alone.

The place in which we found ourselves—I with a thoroughly American spirit of investigation, and feeling in no degree connected with this interesting old England—was a large inclosure, which perhaps in the days of the Normans formed an outer hall, since it was set apart apparently from the dwelling part and public offices of the castle. Its walls were pierced with but few windows, although those of the ruins beyond showed many, now richly hung with ivy and catching all the sparkle and sunshine of the day.

The spot where we sat was in an angle formed by a bit of still solid masonry, whence we could see the country for miles around—mother's country, not mine—yet I felt my heart thrill with something which I believe all Americans experience in beholding the land of their forefathers—an emotion not to be called patriotism, but rather loyalty to the ages which precede ; nay, may we not say, have formed us ?

But mother's eyes were gazing on the landscape, softly, not with any tourist-like alertness ; half-tearful, and evidently dimmed by remembrances which this peaceful scene brought up. The downs and the stretch of gorse-covered moor to the right were full of dancing sunbeams. Through the shadowy portions of the old town a river wound its way, sparkling with every bend and quiver, while beyond all this—beyond the turrets, gables, red roofs and hilly streets of the town—broad waves of sunlight showed us meadow lands and forest, the sheltered glades of a "park" or "place," the fairness of some upland which the springtime had already touched with its smiling caress.

It was a picture hard to associate with the fierce period which called its divisions and its architecture into existence. Yet I was fresh from my studies of English history which illustrated the stories mother had to tell. I knew that King John in his most reckless days had held high revel in the town ; that under Richard II. a cruel constable had made the people live—often hide away—in terror, while even where we sat the groans of prisoners in secret dungeons of the castle used to be heard, giving rise to many a weird tale of the old place being haunted. Yet there were happier associations, too, picturesque and romantic. Hither came Queen Eleanor and her pious court. Here danced the Ladies Brandon in the happy days before their brother's death, and from that old monastic doorway one might almost fancy even now the fair face and figure of Queen Margaret as she doled out the Christmas alms to the poor who trooped up the slope with smiling eyes and uplifted aprons.

"O, mother!" I exclaimed, suddenly linking my arm in hers after a fashion I had, and "cuddling" closer to her so that I could put my head down comfortably on her shoulder (only long practice had made this possible and easy). "Mother, what are you thinking of?"

My mother smiled.

"What do you suppose?"—she spoke with unusual animation. "Look, Helen, do you see, across there, that strip of roadway winding over the moors? See how it divides the bushes of gorse. Well, do you know I was conjuring up, bit by bit, the picture which might have been seen

there one day. First a donkey, carrying a saddle-bag or pannier at one side, on the other a pair of sturdy little legs and feet. Mine, my dear; for I was sitting on the donkey, and very proud because I was allowed to ride up there and see the gorse, or furze, cut. My brother Allan was with me, and another brother was coming to meet us. I remember that day so well because, you see, I was strictly brought up, and not often trusted out alone just with the boys. But what a day it was!"

She went on sketching various details, amusing and happy, which were impressed on my mind not only because they belonged to a personal reminiscence of my mother's but for the reason that my eyes were resting on the actual scene of the girlish adventures she was relating. The road wound like a white ribbon across the slope of the stretch of moor, dividing the furze bushes and forming a distinct if dusty track, on whose crest, while we watched it and talked, an object appeared slowly defining itself against the horizon as a caravan drawn by donkeys, at each side of which some men and women were leisurely walking. Only a suggestion of something florid or unconventional in their costumes could be observed from where we sat, but mother exclaimed, laughing, "Why, there are some gipsies, too—and there was a caravan of them that day! But," she added in a moment, no doubt lest I should, as usual, begin indulging in some romantic notions on the subject, "it's perfectly natural, however, to expect them on any fine day at this season," and immediately began to tell

me about the gipsies she remembered as part of that especial experience.

I was a bit over-romantic, or enthusiastic, on something akin to it, and my mother had the wisest, gentlest way of keeping my mind wholesome and steady. She never laughed at me for any thing unless an absolute folly; never tried to ridicule me out of an enthusiasm, but quietly let me see that another "point of view"—one of her favorite expressions—was more preferable, more "earnest" or "sincere," above all, more "real," and so I could bring my silly little head promptly down out of the clouds with no dread of mortification in applying myself to *terra firma* and its realities again.

"Go on, mother dear," I exclaimed. "Do tell me some more. Where were you living then?"

"You can't see the house from here. I was only visiting, any way."

I fancied a change in her voice. We sat silent for a moment. Then mother looked at her watch.

"Come, dearest, we must be going back to Mr. Vail's. As I remember her, old Miss Vail is very punctual."

We rose to our feet, I rather disappointed that mother's spirit of reminiscence had carried her no further, and a little sorry we had not investigated the rest of the ruins; but it was certainly fun to think of lunching with old Mr. and Miss Vail. All English experiences were fascinating to me. Mother went ahead, going down the little slope slowly, pausing once or twice to pick up some bit of the first of the spring blossoms showing their heads so daintily

among the pale April greens. At the foot, just where the last piece of solid Norman wall rose to mark the place once so boldly guarded, she paused suddenly. Some one was standing there—a tall, elderly gentleman with a pale and handsome face—who was regarding her with eyes in which a glow of most mournful intensity seemed to be burning.

All the softness and happiness had gone out of mother's look. Something I had never seen was there instead—scorn, sorrow of a bitter kind. Even now I hardly know what to call the thing which had driven out of my mother's eyes the look *I* knew and loved. The gentleman stood absolutely still for an instant, then without further evidence of recognition passed on, while mother, catching my hand in hers, fairly swept me away and out into the High Street again.

"Mother," I exclaimed, eagerly, "who was that man? Why did you look at him like that?"

"O, Helen," mother answered in a low tone that was tremulous with emotion, "don't ask me, dear. O, come on, my darling! I had no idea he was here. I have decided now. You had better go to stay with Mr. Vail's friends at Britton-Marsh. Yes, I have decided."

"But, mother dearest," I pleaded, "won't you tell me something more?"

"O, you would not ask if you knew it all, my love," said mother. She had to wipe some tears out of her eyes. "Don't ask me. Here is Mr. Vail's garden. Thank fortune we can hurry in!"

Perhaps something in the pleading of my eyes struck her suddenly.

"My dear," she said, in a very low voice, "you must never talk or think of him again. He was, perhaps—no doubt—*is*, my enemy."

CHAPTER III.

THE PARTING.

MY mother's enemy! The words seemed to darken the very sunshine which a moment before had made the old street radiant. But there was no opportunity to discuss the subject further, and even had there been time I am sure my mother would have forbidden it. But it was impossible for me to keep a dozen wild conjectures out of my mind, and as we knocked at Mr. Vail's door—the house was a quiet-looking one, of brick half-smothered in ivy—the vision of mother's "enemy," the pale, elderly face and deep set eyes, rose before me, and in spite of all my interest in the visit we were about making I could think of little else. Who was he? Where had mother known him first? Where did he live? Shall I ever see him again? These questions danced impatiently through my mind as we stood on the old-fashioned doorstep of Mr. Vail's house. Can you not fancy the eager, restless, girlish figure, the eyes that would have liked to pierce all the future, the impatient young lips which would have asked any questions just to have the problem of the moment solved? Whether mother read all of this in her daughter's face I do not know. Some of it of course was apparent to that keen discrimination of hers, and as the door was opened she laid one of her hands on my arm and, smiling, just gave her head a little shake

that I understood. It was her way often of advising me to "keep cool" or quiet.

A trim-looking young maid-servant admitted us into a rather somber hallway with a spidery-looking staircase, a great many engravings, and just one bit of color—in the open doorway below which looked into a bright garden. Thence we were ushered into a large old-fashioned room where Mr. Vail and his sister, a tiny little old lady, were evidently waiting to receive us.

Mother's delicate face flushed all over as the old lady took her hands, called her "Ada," and kissed her on both cheeks; and then I had to be made known, and Miss Vail said:

"Dear me! dear me! Ada! Not possible this girl is yours."

And mother laughed, and the old people laughed, and we were all very merry for a few moments together. But before luncheon even mother had made known her decision to the old lawyer, thanked him for his kindness, but expressed her desire to have me go to Britton-Marsh at once.

"Did you not say you were going there this afternoon?" mother inquired, so anxiously that I wondered if he would not see that she had a special reason for hurrying me away from Hilford.

"To-morrow morning," he answered. "But surely you will leave her with us for one night?"

We were on our way across the hall to the dining-room, and for a moment mother seemed inclined to draw back

and say something apart to him. But there came a second thought, and she was silent. How much in the future, I used afterward to think, depended on that hesitation and final silence, for it so chanced that she was obliged to hurry away after luncheon, and, I know, said not a word to her old friend of her encounter with the dark stranger I already called the "enemy."

The dining-room, if a trifle shabby and old-fashioned, had a bright center in the table so daintily laid and sparkling with glass and silver, and as it was my first meal in an English home I concluded that every thing was typical; and a very nice, tempting sort of meal it was. Miss Vail's manners were so sweet and "ladylike"—a term seldom to be used, for it is seldom thoroughly understood, but it fitted the dainty little old maiden whose manners had the fine finish and yet quaintness of a century ago, and they were like what a "lady" should be—kind and always considerate.

When she addressed the maid it was as politely as when she spoke to mother and me, and I remember her tone in saying,

"Jane, will you please see if there is not a draught on Mrs. Glenn! I think the window is too wide open."

And Jane's:

"Yes, miss," was prompt and respectful, and when the window was adjusted Miss Vail said:

"That's very nice. Quite right, Jane," and a quick smile passed between the two, mistress and maid, savoring in no way of familiarity, but just what it ought to have

been, a pleasant recognition of a little skillfully rendered service, and the maid went about her duties, I am sure, all the more anxious to earn another such friendly glance.

I clung to mother with dim eyes when the hour of parting came. It was our first separation, and all the delights which I had fancied it involved were forgotten, as we said good-by. I pity girls—and mothers, too—who have not known the sort of friendship, of comradeship, which ought to exist between mother and daughter, and which did in the most perfect way exist between my mother and me; yet no doubt I was selfish enough, as all children are to their parents, fancying the world was all mine and forgetting some of what was mother's share in it.

But just then all the cry in my heart was to go with her. I kept it choked down, of course. Above all things I hated looking silly, and when mother had driven away, when I had caught the last glimpse of her sweet pale face in the carriage window, the last wave of her hand, I felt I must control myself and remember I was among strangers. Miss Vail's voice just at my shoulder sounded very friendly.

"Now, my dear," she was saying cheerily, "don't you want to come up to my room for awhile? I always have to take a rest every afternoon, but you can sit by me and I'll tell you all I can about Britton-Marsh."

CHAPTER IV.

A HEROINE.

MISS VAIL explained, as we went into her room, that she was "something of an invalid," and had to allow herself certain indulgences, like this rest of an afternoon. "But dear me, Helen," she said, smiling upon me, "years ago, when your mother was at home, as she will remember, I was very different! Ready for any kind of excitement or fatigue! Did your mother ever tell you about one famous Hilford Fair-time when she was young?"

I shook my head.

"Mother—doesn't like to talk of those times," I said, a trifle sadly. Miss Vail's tone changed at once. She was preparing to make herself comfortable on her lounge, and also to arrange a little low chair close by for me, and she said briskly,

"Oh! well, well! No doubt it *is* foolish to keep living in the past, but I own to enjoying nothing more than to talk or think of old times."

We talked very sociably until the spring twilight was fast approaching. Still, Miss Vail had given me few points of information. Britton-Marsh, it appeared, was an old-fashioned town, with some manufacturing interests, but a distinctly aristocratic center of its own, "haughty and exclusive," to quote her phrase. I cared nothing just then for this. I wanted to hear about the people I was likely to

meet. And dimly, but with a consciousness of disloyalty to mother which forbade my asking questions, I wished she would give me some hint of the "enemy." But none came. She seemed anxious to interest me in the household I was to be in, and at last I forced myself to forget the subject and person which had so piqued my curiosity and to listen attentively to what she was saying about my future companions, the Bardistons.

"They are *very* worthy people, my love," said dear old Miss Vail in her indulgent, charitable sort of voice. "But life has been a sort of struggle with them. Mr. Bardiston's father was an army officer, and I am afraid—that is I think—he was not always as wise or prudent as he might have been, and brought his children up with an idea of unnecessary luxury and extravagance. Poor Mr. Bardiston was—well, born a failure, I may say. Very improvident and over hopeful, and he died, I understand, when he felt most sanguine about the success of some of his speculations. The children are very nice."

"Oh, are there children?" I was more interested in them than in the luxurious captain or the speculative Mr. Bardiston.

"Well, Cecilia is hardly a *child*," said Miss Vail, thoughtfully; "quite your age, I should say, and a fine, good girl—a little apt to be morose or bad-tempered, perhaps. And Cuthbert, when I saw him last, was a promising boy."

"But isn't it a school?" I inquired, charmed by the prospect of "Cecilia," in spite of her tendency to moroseness or bad-temper.

"Well, yes. That is what it is Mrs. Bardiston's desire to make it. At present, I believe there are very few pupils; but, Helen, there is a *possibility* of your finding a friend in Miss Bayard."

I echoed the name, not remembering ever to have heard of it. "Does she live there?" I inquired. "And will she come to see me? Did she know my mother?"

"O, yes; I mean she knew your mother, but I can not say for certain whether she will come to see you. But, my dear Helen, I want to impress one thing upon you. Of course I am well aware that your mother has her own reasons for not caring to renew old associations here; it was very kind of her not to include us; still, if Miss Bayard should show herself friendly I am certain your mother could not object to it, and it would be a most fortunate thing all around," she added.

"How will she know I am there? Where does she live?" I asked eagerly.

"I presume there will be chances; there always are, somehow, in this world," said Miss Vail, with the contented philosophy which belongs to a quiet life. "And you will be sure to find out where she lives. She is a very well-known person, a rich woman, and rather lonely, I fancy. Not very benevolent. She was a famous beauty in her young days. Dear me! I well remember her at a splendid party twenty years ago! She was the loveliest creature. If I give you my keys you can fetch a scrap-book from my secretary over there and I'll show you a little water-color sketch which

came into my possession rather oddly. It was done by—well no matter—you would not know the name."

I gladly took the keys, and after a slight search found the scrap-book of twenty years ago, which I brought back to the sofa, turning its pages over under Miss Vail's direction, skipping various bits of landscape and architecture, until she said "There!" and laid her hand on the important page.

The face of a beautiful, spirited, and imperious girl looked up at me. She was dressed in a dark-green riding-habit made brilliant by scarlet facings, the broad-brimmed beaver hat having plumes of green and red. If there was a fault to be found in this girlish beauty, it was in a certain domineering pride, which must have been in her expression, since even this sketch reproduced it. The dark eyes seemed to challenge fate or even contradiction, but the lips were curved in a charming smile. I was perfectly delighted, and after one or two "O's!" of satisfaction begged to know more of this wonderful Miss Bayard, whom I might chance to see; and, holding the page up to catch the full light, saw under it in masculine characters:

"AMABEL HELEN BAYARD, 1856."

"My name, Miss Vail!" I exclaimed: "And Amabel—what a beautiful name! like Amy's—darling Amy in the *Heir of Redclyffe*. O, how perfectly splendid!" (N. B.—Girls, we said "splendid" then as you, nowadays, say "grand.")

"So it is your name! Why, I wonder if your mother could have done it for that reason?" Miss Vail was quite

excited over this coincidence and its suggestion. I put my head on my hand for a brief consideration of the case.

"Yes," I said, suddenly, "I do remember now mother told me she had named me for an English friend."

Miss Vail as an old lady, I am afraid, was nearly as romantic as I was as a young girl, and after dinner, while her brother dozed in his arm-chair, we sauntered about the garden, a trifle too chilly, no doubt, but very much absorbed in discussing Miss Bayard ; and is it to be wondered at if I went to bed with my girlish head full of fancies and projects, none of which were very practical or even probable ! Yet one among them seeming to me quite proper and feasible : I would wait a certain length of time at Britton-Marsh hoping for an accidental meeting with this beautiful Miss Bayard, after which I would send her a little note telling her I thought I was named for her and would like so much to see her before leaving England. What gave this idea its permanent impression was the fact that on confiding it to Miss Vail the next morning she declared it might do very well, and added : "I am sure your mother couldn't object."

Now as it never any more occurred to me to do any thing without mother's permission and advice than it would to walk boldly into open danger, I decided that after allowing Miss Bayard one week to discover my vicinity I would write and ask mother just what to do.

I felt quite excited when the time for leaving came. Mr. Vail was to meet me at the station, having business at his office until the last moment, but Miss Vail, and Jane

carrying my hand-bag, escorted me to the train, my trunk having been sent on, and the dear little old lady was as friendly and affectionate in her leave-takings as if I had known her always, while I found myself no longer depressed but feeling sure I was about to step into the midst of something wonderful, and events as exciting as any thing which had ever happened to my beloved heroes and heroines of romance. Well, of course, if nothing had occurred I should have had no story to tell you—but stories are only chronicles, after all, of the strangeness and peculiarity of circumstances. For the most part I am inclined to think very romantic events few enough in real life, in spite of the old adage about truth being stranger than fiction.

"Good-by, my dear," said Miss Vail, for the third time, when I was comfortably in my corner of the railway carriage. "Geoffrey, take good care of her; and Helen," this in a whisper, "if you meet Miss Bayard be sure to write and let me know."

I nodded and said as fervent an "Oh, yes," as if Miss Vail had been one of the girls at school waiting to hear how some adventure would turn out. Then her dear old face was withdrawn, and I found myself whirling through a country of pale spring green and blossom, and as the train curved about a bend in the little river I caught sight of the old castle "keep," where yesterday I had sat and watched the furzy downs with my mother. Oh, if only I knew where she had lived—whom she had visited that time, and who was "Allan" and the other brother. Could it be

—Oh no, brothers couldn't be enemies, I argued to myself, as, curled up comfortably, I watched the fleeting landscape, the jumble of roofs disappearing swiftly, conscious that one of them might once have sheltered the little "sturdy-legged" girl on the donkey of long ago; but my most enjoyable reflections centered about Miss Bayard, whom I felt certain what I called "fate" would lead me to see.

CHAPTER V.

BRITTON-MARSH.

IT has been my good fortune to spend many happy days in the country of my mother's birth and to see many charming places, but for some reason, difficult to define, Britton-Marsh retains the permanent association of a "first love" in my mind, and no breath of landscape, no beauty of architecture elsewhere makes up to me for the fascination of the little rambling town, encompassed by a richly diversified country, through which late on that spring afternoon Mr. Vail and I drove from the railway station, up and down crooked and wide streets to the "Villa," fronting a quaint old green, where Mrs. Bardiston lived. Such elements as I observed—the prominent market buildings, hoary with age, and, it being market-day, their porches filled with country people of all classes, from the prosperous farmer to the shepherd in a smock frock, the streets of quiet antiquity, or the high garden walls that sheltered some fine secluded dwellings, the lanes running here and there out of streets well built though straggling, the High Street, with its variety of shops and air of contented although old-fashioned prosperity—all captivated my fancy and made me decide that, whether I found a hero or heroine or not, I at least, should have the comfort of a most fascinating "setting" for creatures of my imagination.

GEORGE·WHARTON·EDWARDS· 1883

And the sea was not far away. Mr. Vail had told me of this, and I fancied the rich salt scents were in the air. There had been a little rain, scarcely enough to disturb the tender azure of the sky, but the air was pleasantly cool, almost windy for an August day, as, in what Miss Vail had spoken of the day before as the "half-lights," we drove up to Albert Villa, by which name Mrs. Bardiston's dwelling was known. A little garden fronted it; the house, built of stucco, was painted a sort of reddish-brown, and the windows on the lower floor were curved or bowed, those above having swinging casements, within which I caught sight of pretty chintz hangings. The rooms below showed fire-light and moving figures. Somehow, though by no means "fine," or in any way suggestive of the surroundings which I supposed would be Miss Bayard's, this place looked home-like and inviting.

Our carriage, or "fly," as Mr. Vail called it, had barely stopped before the door of the house was opened. A maid-servant came running down the path and two figures appeared on the threshold; a lady in a widow's cap and with a kind and anxious sort of face, a girl rather older than myself, tall and despondent looking. My small belongings were taken by the maid, and in a few moments I found myself shaking hands with Mrs. Bardiston and being introduced to her daughter Cecily, the depressed-looking young girl, who brightened, however, as she greeted me, a sort of color creeping into her sallow cheeks and making her almost pretty for the moment.

Mr. Vail explained at once that he had to hasten off to

see his client, but that he would call in the morning before returning to Hilford. Always quick in his movements, the kind little old gentlemen had vanished almost before we had time to appreciate that he was going, and I was led by my hostess into the sitting-room whose fire-light had gleamed so hospitably through the windows.

I don't know how it was that I formed a very swift but definite impression that the Bardistons must be poor people, with that kind of poverty hardest to bear, since it is endured with a constant effort at concealment. The sitting-room seemed to have been very freshly put in order. Accustomed to the every-day homeliness and simplicity of my mother's parlor in New England, I was quick to detect where there had been an impromptu attempt at cheap decoration, and wondered why some really good engravings were hung almost out of sight and some very shiny looking colors with a high glaze brought into prominence, while the chairs, sofa, and footstools, the center table with its gay cover and illustrated gift books, were arranged with an air of mathematical precision which only produced an effect of bareness on my mind and made me feel as though any thing homelike or sociable would be impossible here. But my welcome was all that could be desired. Mrs. Bardiston, in spite of the anxious puckers in her face, was all brisk cordiality as she begged me to lay aside my wraps and have a cup of tea before going up stairs.

"Here, Cecily," she exclaimed, "take Miss Glenn's hat and jacket—oh!" with a glance at the tall girl's retreating figure, "she has gone for the tea things, I suppose. There,

my dear, sit right down by the fire. It isn't very bright. You see we make the room off the dining-room more our *general* parlor." I could not help a feeling of relief. "And so it is scarcely worth while to keep this fire *always* going. But of *course* if it were ever wanted—if you preferred sitting in here of an evening—"

I felt very much ashamed that she should think of such a thing for an instant, and hastened to say that I would be most comfortable, I was sure, in any room they used, and hoped I would give them no unnecessary trouble. Mrs. Bardiston looked pleased.

"Very nice of you, my dear Miss Glenn," she said in a confidential sort of tone, "I am sure you will only be a delightful addition to our home circle."

I could not help feeling a trifle flattered, as it was very evident she thought me older than my years, and I fancy most girls of fifteen would enjoy such a misapprehension, and remain silent, as I did, beaming my approval upon my kindly, anxious little hostess, who now rose, as though with a sudden idea, and began removing the objects from the table as Cecily's footsteps and the jingle of cups and saucers were heard without.

"We *generally* have supper about eight o'clock," said Mrs. Bardiston, as she began to pour the tea, Cecily in silence guiding her to the necessary articles, "but to-night, as I thought you would like a little stroll about the town, it will be at six—and this, you see," handing me my cup, "is literally *only* a cup of tea—but you will have an hour for rest before supper-time. Now, Cecily, as Miss Glenn

won't take a second cup, suppose you show her to her room."

I followed Cecily up a pretty little staircase to a corridor and the front room, whose chintz hangings I had seen. They formed the chief effect of furnishing in the room, which was as bare as possible, cleanly but uncarpeted, and having only the merest necessaries. A small bed, a chest of drawers, washing-stand and little dressing-table hung with chintz, as were the windows, completed the objects in the room, and perhaps my sense of its chilly bareness was thoroughly shown, for Cecily suddenly put my bag on a chair and turned sharply.

"I suppose it isn't nice enough," she exclaimed. "There, I told mother so! Especially one of Miss Bayard's relations!"

I laughed—yet I felt confused.

"O, indeed it is nice," I exclaimed warmly and taking hold of the girl's hand. "And I am not—" I was about to say "not one of Miss Bayard's relations," yet how did I know? It was certainly very awkward and confusing to stand there pressing Cecily's hand all the harder because I did not know what to say—scarcely, indeed, if the truth were told, who I was!

"You see," said Cecily, sitting down unexpectedly on the edge of my bed, and evidently glad to talk, "we are poor, and we know it, and the pupils don't mind: but when Mr. Vail telegraphed and asked mamma if she could take a young lady from America to board—why, I was frightened, Americans are so hard to suit, so rich—"

I burst out laughing.

"Oh, Miss—"

"Cecily," she interposed, laughing too. "You needn't say Miss Bardiston; of course the pupils do, but that's because they wouldn't respect me otherwise."

"Well, then, Cecily, and my name's Helen, you know; we're not rich people at all, my mother and I. We're—well, not exactly poor, but mother teaches in a school at home, and now she has only gone to Russia to chaperone two of the scholars. That's how I happened to come here."

Cecily's dark eyes brightened.

"Well, I declare, I'm glad," she said, with much good humor. "I was inclined to dread you. Now you're just in time to make ready for supper. And then we'll go for a walk. We can take Cuthbert, so we won't be afraid if it gets a bit late."

"And who is Cuthbert?" I asked, beginning to brush my hair at the little chintz-covered mirror.

"O, my brother. He's only a boy, but he's very good-natured. He is working so hard for a scholarship."

Cecily departed in much better spirits, and I decided I should like her. At all events she was a girl near my own age, and even a difference in nationality can not prevent very young people from feeling sympathetic. I began to like various things about me; the view from my windows, for instance. As I brushed my hair I could see the little green across whose well-trodden pathways people were coming and going in the spring twilight. Some quaint

houses dotted the roadway beyond, and a smithy door wide open showed its ruddy fire, while the faint click of the anvil smote the air every now and then with a cheerful note.

Six o'clock brought Cecily back to my door, and I was ready enough for supper, whether it proved hot or cold, but some savory odors reached us as we neared the dining-room. To reach this room we passed through the family parlor of which Mrs. Bardiston had spoken, and, shabby as it was, there were home-like touches which made it inviting. The motherly looking work-table in one window, the writing-desk and small stand littered with papers, and the old fashioned book-shelves and capacious sofa—all of these ancient belongings had an air of fitness and proprietary right unknown to the more vivid decorations of the little drawing-room, and I was entirely sincere in telling Cecily, or "Sissy," as they seemed to call her, that I thought it a "dear old room."

Around the supper table the rest of the family were assembled. A tall boy with a clever, plain face and sandy hair, and two small girls of about ten and twelve years, were formally introduced as the "Miss Goodwins." The boy I rightly guessed to be Cuthbert—and the Miss Goodwins were the pupils; but all three were too shy to talk much, and Sissy relapsed into her former dejected silence, as soon as we were at the table, Mrs. Bardiston, however, chatting amiably. There was a cold leg of mutton, a salad of some sort, and an apple tart, the latter partaken of only by the Miss Goodwins and myself, although Mrs. Bardiston

made a show of genially offering it to Cuthbert and Sissy, before she remarked she "rarely touched sweets herself;" and I felt a little miserable about having taken any, I must confess, and glad when the meal was at an end, and Sissy promptly suggested we should start for our walk. All of the young people prepared to go, and as we were starting Mrs. Bardiston called after us:

"You had better take Miss Glenn around by Little Britton House, Sissy," and Sissy explained that "Miss Bayard lived at Britton House.

Miss Bayard! I felt quite thrilled by this piece of information, but my ideas of the haughty looking beauty in the green riding habit were on a scale which the term "Little" somewhat dashed.

"Why is it called *Little?*" I asked, as we started to cross the Green. Sissy was occupied in settling one of the Miss Goodwins' frock, and when this was accomplished and the young person admonished to "walk straight and hold her head up" she returned to my side and said, somewhat indifferently,

"Oh, I don't know exactly. Do you, Cuth?"

"Because of the Manor up at Torberry being called *Britton*, I suppose," was his ready answer. "But then I like Miss Bayard's home best."

"Has she always lived here?" I inquired, feeling this at least was a subject on which I could afford to satisfy my curiosity.

"No—although I believe she did live here as a girl. But then her uncle had the place. It is only three years since

she came for good. I don't exactly remember where she lived just before that."

"Near Hilford, wasn't it?" suggested Cuthbert.

It flashed across my mind that perhaps it was in the house mother visited that eventful day long ago. It was hard to hold my tongue, hard not to dash into the conversation, asking questions and gaining information, but I was restrained, remembering my mother's reticence.

Sissy continued:

"Miss Bayard came here when old Mr. Ford was dying, and then she stayed right on. She owns the largest of the mills, you know, and she takes a great interest in the working-people. Here, Miss Glenn, this is the High Street." We had turned up a long irregular street lined with shops showing their closed doorways in the summer dusk. "And now up this way we'll come to Little Britton."

We passed the business street and went up one of quieter purpose, where the houses were set apart and all of an enduring kind. Brick-walled gardens gave an air of seclution if not actual aristocracy to most of these. In the faint dusk we could sometimes hear voices laughing and talking on the other side of these august inclosures, and Sissy, who knew where every one lived, gave me names of the occupants, and now and then paused a moment, as the voices floated over the walls, with a regretful sigh and a wistful glance out of her dark eyes. Poor Sissy! She was a very impatient Peri at the gates of Britton-Marsh paradise!—otherwise, the society of young people in the town who considered her not their equal.

A longer brick wall, richly hung with a dark purpling vine, odors like jasmine, I think, the rich bloom of an almond-tree showing against the evening sky—these were my first impressions of the place I was destined to know later so well—to love so dearly. Then as we young people strode along, laughing nnd talking, Little Britton House came in view, disappointing me at first in that it possessed no grandeur ; little to suggest its being the home of the sparkling girl in the gay riding habit whose picture I could remember line for line. But in another moment I felt an irresistible charm about the solid brick mansion whose doorway opened on the road. It was an imposing if very quiet place. The three tiers of windows looked as though they might belong to spacious chambers, and beyond the garden wall to the left we could see an angle or L of the house ivy-hung, and with a gracious bow window, on the second story, overlooking the bloom and verdure of the garden itself.

"There," cried Sissy, in a soft whisper, "that is Miss Bayard's house. Oh, if you could only see it inside ! But, of course, you will."

Would I ? I stood still with the others, tremulous with a queer kind of excitement as I caught Sissy's hand in mine and looked up at the rows of windows within which lights were not yet gleaming. It possessed all the charm of mystery and romance for me. Something seemed brooding over the dusky gardens that drew me toward them. The evening star was shining above the almond-tree and the widespreading cedars. The sky was softly clear—a sum-

mer sky in which the lamps of heaven were beginning to throb and burn. Had my mother ever been here? Could this have been perhaps one of her homes when she was a girl like me? I felt very oddly, I must say, as having gazed at the old house in deep silence for a moment or two, we turned to go back, and Sissy began talking even more volubly of Miss Bayard herself.

"She has heaps and heaps of money," Sissy was saying in her sweet high voice, "but she is very quiet, people say. If I was in her place, I would dress magnificently every day and give grand parties, and fill the house with company. Oh, it must be perfectly delightful not to care what you spend!"

And Sissy sighed, probably with a reflection that sixpences, or even pence, were as valuable at Albert Villa as bank notes in Little Britton House.

"Does she dress very simply?" I inquired, feeling interested in the smallest details connected with my heroine.

"Oh, her clothes are fine enough, I suppose," said Sissy, with a slight curl in her lip; "that is, they are always rich material, but so plain."

"But she is very beautiful, of course," I insisted.

Sissy turned a critical, contemplative gaze up to the sky while she decided this important question. Then, looking at me with a most judicial air, she said,

"H'm—yes, I believe she is considered so. Mother remembers the time when she was the beauty of the county, but of course she's old now. Why," added Sissy, with the

feeling of fifteen, "I should think she must be every day of thirty-eight or forty."

I agreed with her in considering this decidedly old, but at the same time I could not feel that Miss Bayard was less a heroine of romance for the fact. The spirited pose of the picture in Miss Vail's scrap book was still present to my mind and I could not realize that time had been allowed to do its work with the beautiful original.

The Miss Goodwins, who were still somewhat ahead of us, had fallen into a dispute about something, and, forgeting Sissy's martial air, they allowed their voices to rise, finally separated in a spirit of defiance, and insisted upon each having a side of the road to themselves. Upon this, Miss Bayard and her magnificent possibilities were forgotten ; Sissy swept down upon the children and, taking the youngest by the hand, led her up to me, saying, "Now, Hilda, you'll just take Miss Glenn's hand, if you please, and behave yourself," clasping in her own the hand of Muriel, the older girl. Unfortunate as was the cause, it proved to be the beginning of quite a friendship between little Hilda Goodwin and myself. She was soon reconciled to walking at my side, and when I gave her little hand a soft pressure she looked up at me, smiling in such a wistful way that I seemed to understand the sort of comfort the poor little creature needed. Not that I would have it for an instant appear that the Bardistons were any thing but kind to their pupils. But the fact was, as I soon discovered, every thing connected with the house or school was an anxious financial care, and Sissy, naturally of a sweet, energetic tempera-

ment, had been made irritable by the strain put upon her young shoulders at the very time when she needed what was bright and happy in life.

The dusk of the spring evening had closed entirely by the time we re-crossed the common. The blacksmith's forge was darkened, but ruddy beams of light shone within his cottage windows, and I begged of Sissy to pause long enough for a glance at the cheerful interior. She looked at me, intensely surprised that any thing so common-place should be of interest; but the picture of a bright kitchen where a happy looking family were assembled, the blacksmith reading a daily paper on one side of the table, his wife and daughter busy over some patch-work opposite, the cosy fireside with a wooden settle, a kettle swinging, and a cat comfortably asleep in the glow, all made up a picture which fascinated me, having that homely charm which in English households affects Americans so keenly. Doubtless the blacksmith had been born and bred in the little stone cottage I was gazing upon, and his children's children half a century hence might be living there! The sense of permanence in family tradition had always stirred me curiously, but my mother used to say it was the only evidence of my English parentage, for at heart I was the most down-right and loyal of young Americans!

"Well, I can't imagine," said Sissy laughing, as we took the footpath leading to Albert Villa; "what you can see in the Burges' kitchen to interest you in this way."

I offered no explanation, because I knew nothing that I could say on the subject would be intelligible to her; but

we chatted pleasantly on other topics ; and when I was in my own room for the night Sissy appeared to let me know, she said, that her room was close to mine.

"Suppose you just come and see where it is," she whispered, holding her candle high above her head as she stood just outside my doorway ; " then if any thing happens you'll know where to come."

We crossed the hall, entered a good sized room, uncarpeted, with the merest flaps of curtain, and furnished with bare necessaries. A double bed at the further end revealed the curly heads of the Miss Goodwins as they lay there sound asleep. A cot which Sissy occupied was nearer the door. Small carpet mats were placed in front of the beds and the two washing stands, but a reformatory could scarcely have presented a more chilling exterior, and by contrast my little chintz-hung bedroom looked very homelike, and I fell asleep wondering why the Bardistons tried to keep a school on such meager resources. But then, as Miss Vail had said, Mrs. Bardiston's father had very " genteel ideas," and I suppose she would have considered any other means of livelihood beneath her dignity as the captain's daughter.

CHAPTER VI.

MARKETING.

WE were breakfasting the next morning about eight o'clock, when a double knock sounded on the front door ; the Goodwins started to their feet, glancing at Sissy, who said, in a rather stately voice :

" Hilda to-day."

And the little girl flew to take the letters from the postman, Mrs. Bardiston explaining that the children took turns in answering the postman's knock, their good behavior while dressing deciding which it should be. I expected something from my mother, and could scarcely wait until the little girl returned; and her beaming face as she came towards me showed that I should not be disappointed. But besides mother's long, affectionate epistle was another letter, addressed in an unknown hand, the envelope crested, and emitting a delicate odor of perfume when I opened it.

An exclamation from Sissy, as she glanced at the crest, was followed by the announcement, " From Miss Bayard, I declare ! " and so it proved to be !

I read it, scarcely taking in its meaning, it seemed so extraordinary an answer to all my conjectures of the evening before; for, in a few friendly lines, Miss Bayard said that Mr. Vail had called the day before at Little Britton House and left word that I was with the Bardistons. " I

am obliged to go over to Exeter for the day," wrote Miss Bayard, in a fine old-fashioned hand, "but will try to see you, my dear child, on my return. Your mother was once one of my dearest friends," and the welcome note was signed, "Affectionately your friend,

A. H. BAYARD."

"Well, upon my word!" cried Sissy, "let me see. She will take the train for Exeter—then—" she made a rapid mental calculation, her glowing eyes fixed upon me, "you may expect her this evening."

It certainly gave a stimulus to all the events of the day, although they had an interest in themselves; for, after a little talk with Mrs. Bardiston, it was decided that I should be treated "exactly like one of the family," which I never shall forget caused Cuthbert to say in a quizzical undertone that "he pitied me if that was to be the case;" but the first result was my assisting in the bed-making, with Sissy, after which, while the Miss Goodwins had their "morning class," with Mrs. Bardiston, a large bell being rung to summon them to the dining-room for the purpose, we set forth on a marketing expedition. Cuthbert had already departed for school.

It was a delicious morning. All the tenderness of the spring-time, in this land of green and blossom, was in the air, and Sissy declared that if there was time we should go to the Deanery woods for wild flowers that afternoon. "It will help to brighten up the drawing-room for Miss Bayard's visit," she explained, "and besides it will be fun for us as well," an opinion I heartily concurred in. Mean-

while, however, the practical household details were decidedly interesting. Sissy had a little basket on her arm, and a small list of necessary purchases written down, the butcher's, baker's, and grocer's books lying at the bottom of the basket, so many reminders, Sissy said with a sniff, of the fact that there would soon be three "horrid accounts to settle."

We turned down the quaint old High Street of Britton-Marsh, through which I had driven in the gloaming of yesterday, but which in the soft sunshine of the morning revealed many new elements, and I saw clearly the Town Cross, the market place and jumble of quaint old shops whose upper stories belonged to a period when solid stone work was the first consideration, and whose projecting windows, tiny casements, and low-ceiled interiors were doubtless more picturesque than comfortable. Our first visit was to the butcher's, and here I was amused by Sissy's careful discrimination in the question of quantity and quality for her money. She knew exactly what to buy, and held an animated discussion with Mr. Sprinks, who wanted to induce her to buy a "round roast" when she had decided in favor of the rib. Mrs. Sprinks, as cashier, was seated in a sort of little box at the end of the shop, with a window in it whence she eyed us rather disparagingly, and took Sissy's book between two greasy fingers, entering the amount of the purchase, and inquiring whether "Mrs. Bardiston wouldn't kindly manage to pay something in a day or two," to which Sissy answered calmly that she would report the request to her mother.

The grocer was next visited, with various small results, after which we went up a hilly side street, pausing before a funny little shop built on to a tiny cottage, and where a variety of fresh-looking green vegetables were displayed. On entering, a boy, who was sorting potatoes from bags on the floor, informed us, with a pull of his forelock of sandy hair and a little bob of a courtesy, that "Missus were out in the garden," and Sissy led the way through the shop and a tidy little parlor in the rear, into the prettiest kitchen garden I have ever seen, where, among currant bushes and lettuce beds, an enormous good-natured-looking woman was at work. She turned a broad, smiling countenance upon us, and waited for Sissy to speak. We wanted some fresh vegetables, and these Mrs. Meggs chose carefully, asking after Mrs. Bardiston's health; and, when the purchase was concluded, adding something nice from one of her glass frames, saying, "Perhaps Miss Sissy's ma would like it for a relish," and as we returned to the street Sissy remarked with a sigh, that "she wished all the Britton-Marsh trades-people were as kind hearted as Mrs. Meggs, but," she continued, with a desperate air of doing every body justice, "I suppose it is only natural they should expect their money. It's all very well for people like Miss Bayard, and Sir Peter, and the old Lady Dowling, to let their accounts run for a year—not that I suppose Miss Bayard would do it—but there's some security with people of that sort, whereas, of course, they know just how we are situated. Here's the dairy woman's," she said suddenly, as we turned down a bit of lane running from High Street. "This is

the last place we have to go to." The lane was very muddy, and bordered on either side by cottages of a poor description, which seemed to be overflowing with children, and in one of which a cobbler was at work, in another a tailor, who sat cross-legged on a large table in his front window; but beyond these was the entrance to a sort of small farmyard, on either side of which were cottages, the one constituting the dairy part of the establishment, and the other the residence of Mrs. Burge, the dairy-woman,who, as Sissy explained, was married to the blacksmith's brother. No one was to be seen in the dairy or milk-room when we entered. Rows of shining tins hung upon the walls, and some filled with milk were standing on shelves below, while baskets of fresh eggs were near by, and through an open door I caught a glimpse of a second room where a bright fire was glowing and upon which pans full of milk were scalding, preparatory to the manufacture, Sissy explained, of the famous "Devonshire cream." Finding no one here, we crossed the yard, Sissy opening the cottage door without ceremony and calling from the foot of the stairs, "Mrs. Burge!" and then "Jane Ann," in answer to which a very pretty, blooming-looking girl appeared above, hastening down, explaining that her mother had just stepped out for a moment. I thought, as we retraced our steps to the dairy, that Jane Ann was one of the prettiest girls I had ever seen, but later experience in the Devonshire country proved her blooming type, blue eyes and golden hair, to be very usual among the poorest even of her class, and in Jane Ann's case a certain heaviness of expression prevented her

beauty from being as attractive as its perfection of coloring would warrant.

"Oh yes," said Sissy carelessly, in answer to my expressions of admiration when we were once more in the High Street. "I suppose Jane Ann Burge is a pretty kind of girl, but you see so many like her, and she is so stupid. However, they say she is to be married to a very nice young farmer near Exeter, and she understands the dairy business thoroughly;" and Sissy expatiated upon various elements in the life of the Britton-Marsh trades-people, evincing an interest in them which might have made her aristocratic grandfather shudder, could he have listened to some of her remarks.

We returned to deposit our purchases in the kitchen, after which Sissy took the Goodwins in hand for a music lesson, while I found a place in the sitting-room for my writing-desk, and time for a letter to my mother, in which I mentioned having seen Little Britton House and received a letter from its mistress.

I was conscious at the one o'clock dinner, which, Mrs. Bardiston explained, was eaten at that "barbarous hour" on account of the children, of the same effort and self-denial on the part of the family which had made supper last night decidedly uncomfortable for me, and after thinking the matter over some time in my mind, trying to determine what mother would do under the circumstances, I decided to be as frank with Mrs. Bardiston on this subject as I had been about making myself useful earlier in the day. She was alone in the sitting-room, a huge basket of mending

piled up on the table before her, while Sissy was occupied in some mysterious way in the drawing-room. I stood for some time in the window, in silence, trying to frame appropriate and sufficiently delicate sentences in which to show her that I did not desire any luxuries at the table such as it was evident were introduced on my account. But finally it seemed best to plunge at once into the subject, and to my surprise Mrs. Bardiston took it most genially.

"You seem so sensible, my love," she said in a confidential tone and laying down her work, "that I am sure we shall all get on admirably. You see the expenses of the school this year have been enormous. I may say *enormous*," she added, glancing around the sitting-room as though to indicate some signs of this lavish expenditure, "and consequently we are obliged to economize wherever we can. In order to keep up my connection I have to entertain visitors from time to time and appear as prosperous as possible; for, singular to say"—Mrs. Bardiston spoke with the most deliberate enunciation, as though each word were to be polished off—"nothing succeeds like success." I could not help a passing reflection as to the amount of success which the Miss Goodwins as her only pupils indicated, but of course I said nothing, and she continued: "My poor papa always trained us to be most particular about appearances. I well remember the time when my sister Maria and I were never able to appear in company at the same time because we had to share one muslin frock between us, varied somewhat by different colored ribbons, but, although I possessed a good cashmere gown at the time, and cashmeres were

certainly worn by the nicest people, papa would never permit us to appear in the evening in any thing but white muslin, such as the Miss Dowlings and other county ladies wore in company, assuring us that these details might mean our settlement in life. Poor Maria would, no doubt, have married well had she lived, for every one admired her figure, and her fine color, and she looked particularly well in muslin. But to return to the subject we were discussing. I feel that, as you pay thirty shillings a week, you ought to have every household comfort."

I eagerly assured her that I had the very simplest tastes, and it would really be a source of pain to me if my being with them was any great increase of expense; and evidently to Mrs. Bardiston's relief, certainly to my own, the conversation ended in her agreeing to make no difference for me whatever, but I felt positively abashed by her expressions of gratitude and appreciation of this "very considerate behavior on my part."

CHAPTER VII.

THE DEANERY WOODLAND.

THERE proved to be time for a walk to the Deanery woods, and shall I soon forget my first ramble in what seemed to me a veritable Arcadia! We all set out, Cuthbert, the little girls, with Sissy and myself, about three o'clock, each provided with baskets for the flowers we were sure to find, and my spirits rose with every step, so that by the time we had left the High Street and turned down a broad lane leading to the lower gateway of the woods I felt like some bird newly freed from its cage, every thing within me exulting in the sweetness of the air, the fairness of the sky, and spring green and blossom of the landscape. Sissy explained that there was no Dean at Britton-Marsh, but the fine, rambling old house to which the woods belonged had been known for generations as the Deanery, for what reason it was impossible to tell, while, in spite of various attempts on the part of old Lady Dowling, who resided there, to prevent it, the public still had a right of way, granted a century before, through not alone the woodland but the park.

"She tried to put a stop to it," said Cuthbert, "about five years ago, Dan Burge told me, but there was no end of a row in the town about it, so she had to give way."

I was very thankful this was the case when, passing

through a little gate, we took a footpath which led us into the cool depths of the most beautiful woodland, fairly carpeted with the wild flowers which from early spring till late autumn make Devonshire a land of blooming delight. And, like many English girls, Sissy Bardiston was well versed in flower knowledge—I can scarcely call it a scientific acquirement—for she had studied very little on the subject, but she knew more of the life of these woodland blossoms than any one I had ever met and cared for them as I did myself, tenderly, lovingly, as though they were living things, so that on this as on many a future occasion the time flew by sympathetically and to me full of instruction as well as charm. With what delight did I greet my first glimpse of a primrose bank, the pale yellow blossoms like stars among their deep furry leaves, and I would have filled my basket with them but for the fact that violets, wood anemones, and the tender little celandine claimed some of my attention. Trailing vines full of delicate blossoms were found, and the last of the March daffodils, while ferns, already green and thriving, were in profusion, so that the question was not what we *could* find but how much of all this wood and blossom we could carry home. Our baskets laden to their utmost capacity, Sissy said we had better walk home by way of the Deanery, so that I might see the old house even from a distance ; therefore we left the woods by their upper entrance, striking a footpath across a bit of meadow, and thence into a road which skirted the small park and luxurious gardens of Lady Dowling's home. At a certain bend we paused, and

through the pale green foliage on a lawn I could see very clearly a rambling mansion of brick and stone, with a rather somber though imposing façade, and with one turreted wing in which Hilda Goodwin whispered to me was "the ghost chamber," while Cuthbert pointed out that a certain yew walk to the right of the old Plesaunce was where the ghost was said to walk at stated periods in the year. A blood-curdling tale was outlined to me as we strolled on, but Sissy said she had never heard all the details. Tradition said that a former Lady of the Deanery had given evidence to some of Cromwell's soldiers which betrayed the king, and in despair and remorse she had drowned herself in the pond beyond the yew walk, her spirit appearing from time to time during the same season of the year in which she had betrayed her king. Sissy enjoyed relating this story in an impressive voice, and I would have been greatly interested and anxious to pursue the subject but for the fact that little Hilda's hand was trembling in mine, and I whispered to Sissy that we had better talk of something else, whereupon she good-naturedly rushed into the question of what time Miss Bayard would choose for her visit.

It proved rather later than we had expected. The drawing-room, which Sissy had arranged in the most "elegant" manner possible, was further decorated with our flowers, tea had been long over, and we were all seated in the little parlor, an anxious air of expectancy pervading the whole party for more than an hour, when suddenly there came down the road which we could see from the side window a fine car-

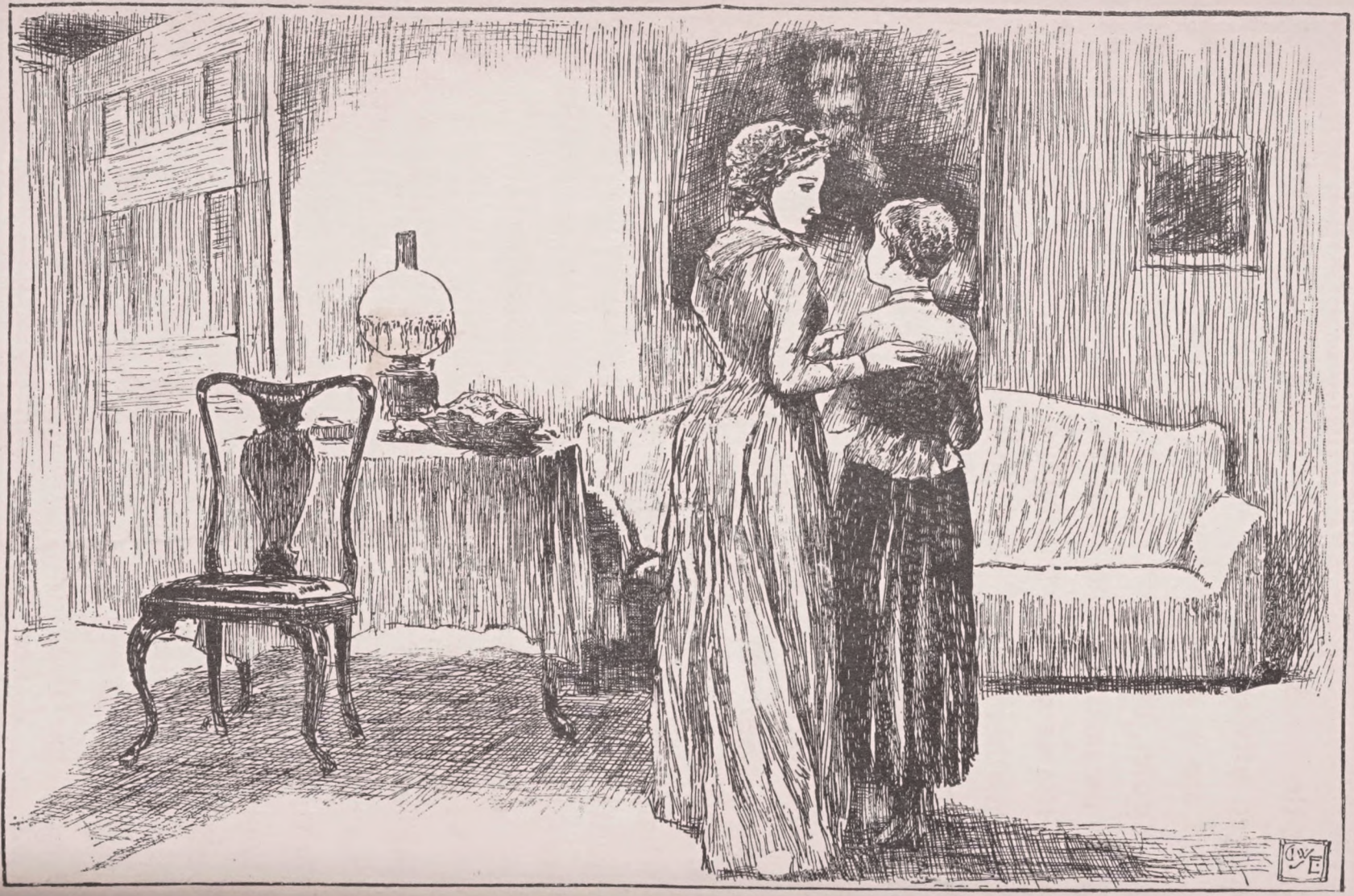
riage drawn by white horses and with liveried servants. A rat-tat on the door was followed by Sissy's darting into the kitchen and producing the little maid who had been miserable in her best cap for a long time, and who now hastened to the door with the air of importance due the occasion. A breathless pause ensued, followed by the return of the maid with a card on a small salver. It was for me. Miss Bayard was in the drawing-room. Feeling myself quite as excited as the Bardistons, and with a sense that I might be in a confused dream, I made my way down the hall and into the drawing-room, where Miss Bayard was standing in the half lights of the evening.

CHAPTER VIII.

MY HEROINE.

HOW is it we gain first impressions of things or people which later become permanent associations in our minds? The causes seem in the first place so trifling that I have often wondered, as I look back over events in my girlhood, just what made them so fixed in my mind. Going into the drawing-room that May evening I was as swiftly and definitely impressed by the lady whose face and figure were only half revealed in the shadows of the room as though I had seen her by clear noonday with time for a close and definite inspection. A tall, graceful figure, a pair of quiet eyes out of which all the fires of youth —if there had been any—must have died away, brown hair tinged with gray and smoothed back from a placid brow—must I confess it? much to my disappointment I realized at once that this lady, this Miss Bayard, was not at all the beautiful young creature of the scrap-book in Hilford, but decidedly an "old maid," beautiful, certainly, but with a middle-aged loveliness which I was too young at first to appreciate, seeing it, especially, as I did for the first time when my head was full of fancies about the imperious beauty in the riding-habit of scarlet and green.

Miss Bayard was standing with her face turned toward the door, and even before the little maid had contrived to



Miss Byard drew me toward the little sofa.

light the lamp I saw that she was smiling pleasantly, and she moved forward, holding out her delicately gloved hand.

"I am *so* glad to see you, my dear," she said in a low, very quiet, but sweet voice. She held my hands in hers, drew me nearer to the lamplight, and gazed down at my face with the very kindest, although keenest scrutiny. "I knew your mother *so* well," she added, without loosening her hands from mine, and then continued with some abstraction in her tone: "I loved her *very* dearly! Do you think, Helen, she will come here?"

Miss Bayard drew me towards the sofa, where I sat beside her, my heart beating fast between a desire to make friends at once with this lady, and yet not knowing in the least what mother would wish me to do or say. But something in Miss Bayard's face, its perfect sincerity—a certain nobility of expression which was its greatest charm—made it easy for me to go on without much embarrassment.

"I don't think mother will come here," I answered, speaking earnestly. "I don't know just why it is, Miss Bayard, but she does not care to talk about old times in England, or to see people, I think. She has told me very little of her home. I think something very painful must have happened when she was young."

"You are right," said Miss Bayard, quietly. There was a pause, and then she said, smiling in a way which I thought made her eyes much sweeter than those in the picture, "but I hope, Helen—perhaps—we may be able to make her forget all that was sorrowful in the past, or," she added in a lower tone "*forgive it.* However, my dear, I can not think

she would object to your knowing me." She smiled a little curiously. I suppose it struck her as odd that the great lady of Britton-Marsh should have to ask as a favor that *I* should visit her! But she went on directly. "Mr. Vail seemed to think there could be no possible harm in your visiting me—and I will write your mother at once."

I am sure a glad light must have leaped into my eyes. The prospect seemed so delightful.

"I wrote to-day," I explained, "and told her about seeing your house when we walked out last evening and also that you had written me. In her letter to-day she said she *might* stay a little while longer than she expected in Russia, to see something of St. Petersburg, if I wrote her that I was contented."

"Very good," said Miss Bayard, "I suppose you will soon have an answer, and meanwhile, as I am going away for a time to Paris, will you spend to-morrow with me for a nice long day? I will undertake to explain it to your mother."

My answer may well be imagined. Miss Bayard's taking the responsibility out of my hands made it easy enough for me to be at rest in the matter, and I only regretted that she could not stay longer now, I felt as though I had so much to say to her and to hear; but there was the happiness in prospect of the "long day," and when a moment later, she rose, saying that she must hurry home, I felt almost as though she must have been known to me before, so sympathetic, although quiet, was her manner—nothing of the *grande dame* in it so far as assumption went, yet much in the exquisite refinement and simplicity of what was her perfectly good breeding.

I walked with her to the little gate, before which the ponderous old-fashioned looking carriage with liveried servants was standing; saw the last of her as she drove away, and turned back to meet Mrs. Bardiston and Sissy, both of whom were full of inquiries as to what the great lady had said about my going to Little Britton House. They were evidently relieved when I told them that I was only invited to spend the day.

"I was afraid," said Mrs. Bardiston, "that we were going to lose you at once. Sissy, are the children in bed? Then call Cuthbert, that we may have supper at once."

Supper at Albert Villa on this occasion consisted only of cold meat, bread and cheese, served on a tray in the dining-room, not over-daintily it is true, and yet I often look back to those eight o'clock meals with the Bardistons, remembering how keen an appetite I brought to them and how satisfactory they always seemed. During the progress of supper on this eventful evening, Mrs. Bardiston discoursed on various points of recollection suggested by Miss Bayard's visit, and I gained an impression that she was comparatively little known to the Britton-Marsh townspeople, having spent most of her girlhood in Surrey, only coming down here on rare occasions, and having literally no relations, since her uncle's death, in the neighborhood. All this was interesting enough in spite of its being interspersed with various anecdotes relating to the Captain and "Maria," or *Mr. B—*, as his widow always called the late Mr. Bardiston; but I longed for a *tête-à-tête* chat, girl-fashion, with Sissy in my own room, and was thankful when prayers were over, and the

little Goodwins comfortably in their bed, she came into my room for a cosy talk.

I verily believe Sissy was more excited than I, over Miss Bayard's visit. She curled herself up on the foot of my bed, her eyes sparkling with interest, and her thin young face showing the most alert animation, while she held forth as to the possibilities and the probabilities which would result from this acquaintance.

"I never heard of Miss Bayard's taking up any body before," said Sissy, who was watching me, her chin resting on her hands against the foot-board. "Now, suppose she should just adopt you, and make you her heiress? They say she has very few relations."

I burst out laughing. The idea of any body's adopting me—with mother alive!

"I would not be adopted by the queen," I answered. "Why, Sissy, you don't know how much mother and I are to each other. I am very glad to know Miss Bayard, but I would never speak to her again if I thought it would take me away from mother."

Sissy simply stared. But after a moment she said, reflecting:

"Well, I am fond of mother, too, but I do believe if my godmother in Wales were to ask permission to adopt me we would both of us think it too good a chance to lose. But there! My godmother would as soon think of flying in the air as adopting any body, although she has promised me a legacy."

"And such a thing would never occur to Miss Bayard,"

I said decidedly. "But, oh, Sissy, I do think it is really romantic."

I stopped short suddenly, finding myself on the verge of a remark as to my mother's former acquaintance with Miss Bayard, but Sissy was decidedly too engrossed in speculations of another character to observe my hesitation.

"She has a fine house, I believe, in London," Sissy said presently. "Mary Andrews, the doctor's daughter, was there once when she went to town with her father, but Miss Bayard is rarely in it. I am sure I wonder how she passes her time."

A long time after this I used to think, with a smile, of Sissy's remark and my own conjecture on the same subject; for, unversed as we were in the ways of the world, or I might say of life, it did not occur to us that a rich, independent woman who made so little external demonstration as Miss Bayard had any particular object in her daily life. How much a few years taught me!

I might laugh at or with Sissy's imaginative fancies, but the same sort of spirit, although it took a different form, certainly animated me. And when the young girl had said good-night, and I found myself alone, lying awake in the darkness of my little room, I could not help indulging in speculations which were no doubt as foolish as Sissy's, if they were not quite so mercenary. I had no scruples about visiting Miss Bayard, and I had decided to write old Miss Vail immediately, and also to give mother a detailed account of my visit to Little Britton House as soon as it was over. So, planning and thinking for the all-eventful

morrow, I fell asleep, losing myself in dreams wherein unimportant trifles of the day were prominent and I awoke to find a flood of sunshine in my room and the breakfast bell ringing.

CHAPTER IX.

LITTLE BRITTON HOUSE.

SISSY was waiting for me in the dining-room, with an air of dignified importance. She held a letter in her hands, a dainty little note on the pink paper then in vogue, and as soon as she gave it to me I saw that it came from Miss Bayard. It ran as follows:

"I will send the carriage for you, dear Helen, at half-past nine, which I suppose will not be too early. Please say to Mrs. Bardiston that I will see you safely home by eight o'clock. A. H. B."

Sissy watched me with an admiring sort of fondness while I read the letter, and she waited on me at breakfast with the same manner, helping me to every thing, as though I were a person of remarkable importance, giving Muriel Goodwin a little tap on the back when she asked me to help her to some more porridge, and attending to this merely practical detail with an air which plainly showed that she considered it beneath my dignity to do any thing but attend to my own repast. Dear Sissy! I have no doubt it was a fortunate thing that she was capable of indulging in a little harmless romance of the kind, for her life at this period of my friendship with her was in many ways a singularly trying one, and if she could obtain any happiness from idealizing my position I rejoice that she did so.

To pin the attention of the Goodwins to their lessons when Miss Bayard's fine carriage and liveried servants were expected would have required more than Mrs. Bardiston's authority; and, indeed, when the moment came my departure was witnessed by the entire household, even Susan the maid lingering in an upper window to observe the state in which I drove away, while I felt not a little excited and decidedly elated by the prospect of the day at Little Britton House in the company of the remarkable Miss Bayard.

In less than ten minutes the carriage had paused before Miss Bayard's door; the very ceremonious footman assisted me to alight, and knocked with a sharp rat-tat-tat, while I felt my heart beating with anticipation and delight.

I was admitted by a bright-faced maid-servant into a hall, spacious and fine in some of its appointments, yet having a homelike air. There were engravings on the walls, huge pots of blue china, filled with feathers, peacock-plumes, and the like, while the staircase of darkly polished oak had two comfortable little landings before it curved to the second floor. Either side of this sociable hall-way were heavy oaken doors, one of which opened almost as quickly as I entered, and Miss Bayard herself appeared. She greeted me most affectionately, and led the way up to the drawing-room, which opened from the second little landing, and which was, I saw at once, the room in the L with a fine, curving bow-window overlooking the garden.

I can scarcely do justice to the charm of that room, which had much that was very stately in it and much that was cosy

and home-like, yet all harmonious and complete. Near the bow window low book-shelves skirted one side of the wall, above which two or three old portraits were hanging. There was a deep window-bench cushioned in dark red silk with a flowered pattern upon it, two easy-chairs, Miss Bayard's writing table, a work-stand, and low revolving book-case, besides a capacious lounge placed against the wall near enough to the window for one to look out on the old-fashioned glories of the garden, the great cedar, the apple and peach trees now laden with blossoms. The further end of the room contained many beautiful objects, richly inlaid cabinets, pictures of priceless value, and furniture antique in design, solid and stately looking, but it was evident that Miss Bayard preferred the bow-windowed side of the room, to which she led me at once, ringing for a servant to take my wraps up stairs.

An hour flew by, all too swiftly, in the most delightful conversation. Miss Bayard grew interested in every detail of our American life, and I might have talked on indefinitely but for the arrival of a messenger from the Deanery which obliged Miss Bayard to leave me a little while, but she provided very interesting occupation. Sending the servant for "Mrs. Buckstone," she explained that this was her former maid, now her housekeeper, and, as she had known my mother, she would be only too delighted to take me for a chat to her own special sanctum, "where I have no doubt," said Miss Bayard, smiling, "Martha will keep you well enough amused."

The door opened upon a stout, elderly woman with the

most good-natured sort of countenance, and who looked at me with affectionate interest while Miss Bayard said :

" Martha, this is Miss Helen Glenn, Miss Ada Marsh's daughter, you know, and I am sure she will not mind my asking her to excuse me for an hour, because it will be so pleasant for her to go to your room for a while."

Mrs. Buckstone, or Martha, as I soon came to call her, smiled broadly, saying :

" Dear me, dear me, just to think of Miss Ada's daughter being with us," and with a very kindly look in her blue eyes she led the way down stairs and to a comfortable room just under the drawing-room, which she said that Miss Bayard was good enough to let her appropriate to her own use. It was very evident that Martha's own personality was impressed upon the room. The walls were decorated with a variety of objects, pictures, some of which must have been cut from illustrated papers, but which were neatly framed, portraits of the Royal Family, the Queen, and a group of her then youthful children, some naval heroes, a group of little silhouettes in black ebony frames, brackets with a queer collection of objects on them, but with all of which I was destined later to make an intimate acquaintance. These gave the very walls of the room a fascination which captivated me at once, while the furniture was of the most inviting sort, from the very large, square table, with its gay cover, work baskets, books, and odds and ends, to the chintz-covered easy-chairs and sofa, and the recessed window like the one above, which was pleasantly occupied by a second table, near which were comfortable chairs. The fireplace contained

Where I sat I could see across the garden and a side roadway that skirted the hedge

one of the high, old-fashioned grates with a place either side on which to rest the tea-things or the hot-water kettle, and above it was a chimney-piece ornamented by a variety of objects, among which were the china figures of a shepherd and shepherdess and some of the prickly looking china dogs which belonged to Martha's childhood.

"We are in great hopes that you can come here for a visit, my dear," said Martha, when she had seen that I was comfortably ensconced in the window. "Miss Bayard's going to write to your mother, she tells me, at once about it."

"Oh, how delightful!" I exclaimed, and, I added a little timidly, "Martha, did you know my mother?"

Martha looked at me curiously. "Yes, indeed, Miss Helen, I knew her well."

But she spoke with the manner of one who, however much there may be to say, prefers silence, and I, of course, felt that it would not be obeying my mother's wishes to ask any questions. Martha had taken up her sewing, and in the silence which followed my gaze drifted out across the garden and a side roadway which skirted the low hedgerow of an adjoining place. Set in the midst of what looked like a neglected park was a house painted dark red and white, in a curious fashion, and with a galleried wing like pictures I had seen of old Italian palaces or villas. It was a fine place but singularly deserted, and I turned back to ask Martha who lived there. She followed the direction of my glance, and then said that she believed it had been a long time empty.

"I have never seen it occupied since we were here," said Martha. "I believe it belongs to some great estate; but the

young lady of the family died there suddenly—can you see where two windows in the gallery are barred up?—and so the people moved away."

I fancied there was a slight constraint in her way of giving these fragmentary details, but the house interested me curiously, probably from its air of solitary grandeur in the midst of so much neglect and almost decay. "The White House," Martha said it was called, because of its light color, and she did not doubt but that it was very fine inside.

I speedily discovered that Martha Buckstone told the most interesting sort of stories, for, roving about the room and asking her various questions connected with the objects I encountered, I found that she had a tale to tell about nearly all of them. For instance, when I lifted from its place on a little side bracket a large work-box with a picture of St. Paul's on the lid, Martha said at once :

"O, that is Miss Bayard's famous work-box. I must tell you the story of that, my dear," and forthwith related a tale which I need not repeat here, as I shall have occasion later to repeat it. But it was a captivating little romance, I thought, and presently Martha opened the box and produced some other treasures, all of which had their historic association. One of these was a strip of brocade, lavender ground, with pale yellow flowers upon it. This fragment of silk, taken carefully out of a tissue-paper wrapper, was displayed to me, while Martha Buckstone described Miss Bayard's appearance in a dress of which this was a sample, at a certain foreign festivity. Next came a curl of brown

hair which had been cut from Miss Bayard's head one night when she lay ill of a fever, and because of which it seemed to have acquired a special value in Martha's eyes, and although she called it "golden brown" I must say I never saw any glimmer of gold about it, but it had no less a charm for me as belonging to the same romantic past in which Miss Bayard wore the brocaded ground and did her hair in curls.

We chatted pleasantly for at least an hour, during which I not only listened to Martha's anecdotes, but told her a great deal about America, in which she had a cousin living, though exactly where she was not certain, when a little bell sounded which Martha said was a summons for me to Miss Bayard's presence again.

She had finished writing her letters when I returned to the drawing-room, and said at once that as she hoped soon to have me for a visitor in the house she wanted to make me feel at home directly. "So, my dear, I went on with my day's routine as usual."

A number of letters were lying on the little davenport, and when Miss Bayard asked me whether I would not like to stamp them for her I saw that many were addressed to charitable institutions, and, as I learned later, found that Miss Bayard's large wealth was treated by herself as a trust for others. I could not help smiling to myself thinking of Sissy Bardiston's speculation concerning what the "great lady" did with her money, and Miss Bayard must have caught the smile, for she said, glancing up from her needle-work:

"What are you thinking about, my dear?"

And I answered frankly,

"I was thinking of something Sissy and I were talking about the other night. We came down here to look at your house and Sissy said—"

I broke off suddenly, feeling the color flame into my cheeks. Miss Bayard was regarding me intently.

"Sissy said what, my dear?" she smiled indulgently and took my hand in both of hers.

There was nothing for it but to go on, so I said hurriedly,

"She wondered how you spent your money, and so did I." I added this hastily from a sense of honor, but feeling very much ashamed, so that it was a relief when Miss Bayard laughed brightly.

"I suppose Sissy would have liked me to do something very splendid once in a while," she said, the correctness of her conjecture making me blush furiously again. "But, my dear, when you and Sissy Bardiston are ten years older you will find that there are useful ways to spend an income ten times as large as mine. But tell me," she added suddenly, breaking off from this subject, "how are the Bardistons getting on? You must not think me anxious to meddle in my neighbors' affairs, but I want very much to know how the Bardistons are doing. Do you think they are prospering or really very poor?"

I plunged at once boldly into a narrative of what I considered the Bardistons' real position, well knowing that Miss Bayard could have no motive but a kindly one for

asking me such questions. When I had finished my hostess said in a sympathetic tone of voice :

"You see Mrs. Bardiston is not one to whom I could speak frankly on the subject. She has that kind of pride which makes it seem preferable to appear as well off as her neighbors ; but there are the children to be thought of."

Dinner interrupted this pleasant talk. Miss Bayard dined early, "from force of habit," she said, and as we sat down to the well-appointed table explained that for many years she had lived with an old uncle, a great recluse, who preferred a midday meal. "I hope you will find, my dear, that we have very cosy suppers, if you come to stay with me," she added pleasantly. My heart gave a bound of fresh delight at the prospect—if only mother would not forbid it !

After dinner we drove out, and to my great delight went on business to the Deanery, entering by the main gate, and up an avenue which led straight to the grand old house, with its picturesque doorway. The interior was in keeping with what I fancied a manor house of the olden time would be. We were ushered into a lofty drawing-room, lighted by many windows and magnificently furnished, and where a very old, and I must say very ill tempered looking, little lady was seated in a deep easy chair, while a sweet-faced young girl, dressed in deep black, sat near by reading aloud.

The young girl, whom I knew later to be Lady Dowling's companion, rose when we were announced and glided from the room, while Lady Dowling, after greeting Miss

Bayard as pleasantly as any one with an habitual frown and a gruff voice could do, extended to me two bony fingers, giving a little grunt, which I suppose was meant for "How do you do?"

After a few commonplace remarks were exchanged Miss Bayard said that she had come herself, although on business, to inquire whether Lady Dowling had any of her houses at Britton Bay vacant. This suggestion animated the old lady in a surprising fashion, and a rapid talk ensued, to which I paid very little attention, although fragments reached me which showed that Miss Bayard was ready to negotiate for one of the houses in question. Lady Dowling declaring that her terms were "ridiculously low," but Miss Bayard's security, etc., etc. She evidently desired to flatter Miss Bayard, but her good humor produced no effect upon that lady beyond bringing a sort of amused smile to her lips, and she rose, agreeing to come to some decision in the matter as soon as possible.

No explanation of my parentage or my being in Britton-Marsh had been given; but when we were again in the carriage Miss Bayard said in her most cordial tone:

"I thought, Helen, your mother would prefer my making no special introduction here of you. I can not discuss her reasons for shrinking from old ties, but I feel sure that she will do wisely in allowing you to make me a visit. I will be back from Paris in six weeks, about the time I judge she would be thinking of leaving Russia. I will write her then an urgent letter, and you can add a few lines if you will yourself."

My answer may well be imagined, but recalling my conversation of yesterday with poor Mrs. Bardiston I felt a pang of regret at the withdrawal of the thirty shillings a week which she had assured me was a perfect "God-send" in their house-keeping. However, it was still all a chance, and when about half past seven o'clock, after a delicious tea which fully justified my expectations, Martha Buckstone accompanied me to Albert Villa I had a queer, half-homesick sensation, fearing that the delightful visit might never come to pass.

Mrs. Bardiston insisted upon Martha's coming in and sitting down in the little parlor, and her usual dignity vanished, giving way to the most sociable and friendly manner while they chatted about various matters in the town, and, as I learned later, when Sissy and I went off to my room, Mrs. Bardiston became very communicative and told her visitor many of the trials in her daily life.

Sissy's frame of mind was as excited and interested in the events of my day at Little Britton House as I could desire, and I gave a graphic account of every thing, answering her most minute inquiries and sending her off to bed more firmly than ever of that opinion—which seemed just as preposterous to me as it had the night before—that Miss Bayard certainly meant to "adopt me."

CHAPTER X.

ALBERT VILLA.

MY daily life at Albert Villa was soon settled into as much of routine as could be said to exist in a household where there was a perpetual sense of effort and the sort of irregularity when there are "appearances," to be constantly maintained, and to which the actual comfort of the family was frequently sacrificed. The only pupils during my stay there were the little Goodwins, whose parents were in India, and it used sometimes to seem to me that it would have been so much better had Sissy and her mother been willing to openly acknowledge to their friends at Britton-Marsh that they did not do certain things because they could not afford them, and give up this painful striving after "effect," which in reality produced, I used to feel, only a painful impression upon lookers-on. We dined at uncomfortable hours, and in a fragmentary sort of way, so that all traces of the meal should be out of sight before there was a chance of the people or, as Mrs. Bardiston called them, the "patrons," who were likely to call of an afternoon, to inquire about the school. Afternoon tea was likewise eaten in a hurry, and apt to be taken in odd places, while it was fortunate that the slight chill in the air had disappeared, since there seemed no chance of a fire anywhere except in the little drawing-room. Cuthbert worked

early and late, doing all sorts of errands for his mother and the household generally, and yet contriving to study for a scholarship at which he was aiming; and I used to be heartily sorry for the lad who, at an important period of his life, was ill-fed, ill-clothed, and decidedly overworked. After the first week or two I discovered that I could be of great assistance to him, in going over some of his lessons, my mother, who had a passion for classical study. having grounded me sufficiently in Latin to make me capable of being of some service to Cuthbert ; we contrived to get a great deal of pleasure out of the enthusiasm for Latin, which we shared, and gradually it came to be an understood thing that, for an hour every evening, we had one end of the sitting-room table to ourselves and our books, Cuthbert working himself into what Sissy laughingly called quite a "fine frenzy" over the Æneid, which we were reading, while I was glad enough to keep up something in the way of study. Sissy accepted all the discomforts of the household with a kind of sad resignation, but grumbling often in a general way at the hardness of her lot. She seemed, however, to think that there was no better outlook than the misty prospect for "pupils," somewhere in the future, while all her efforts to keep the weekly accounts down did not avert constant trouble with the tradespeople whom she visited regularly, day after day, I accompanying her often, there being a tacit sort of understanding between us that by so doing I saved poor Sissy some of the hard speeches they made her when she was alone. I did not like to add to her unhappiness by confessing the dread I used to feel

"demand" an increase of household expenditure of any kind.

Above and beyond all, during this time, when I shared the household anxieties of the Bardistons, I had the prospect of my visit to Miss Bayard's illumining whatever was cheerless at Albert Villa, and in answer to inquiries written me by Miss Bayard I had given her an account of Mrs. Bardiston's troubles, telling her of Cuthbert's talents and industry, and of Sissy's hard work for the household generally, adding that I felt very certain things must come to a crisis soon, for I knew that nearly every thing I paid had gone to making up arrears in rent, and the tradespeople were growing more uncivil every day.

Four weeks had gone by of the time mentioned by Miss Bayard for her visit to Paris, when one morning Sissy came to my room while I was making my bed to ask that I accompany her on her marketing expedition.

"To tell you the truth," said the poor girl, whose eyelids were red from recent weeping, "I don't dare to face Mrs. Sprinks alone. Oh, if mother would only consent to giving up the idea of a school!"

Although my heart sank at the prospect of visiting Mrs. Sprinks in her present frame of mind, I could not desert poor Sissy, and we set forth carrying the little basket as usual, but our worst fears were realized!

"It can't be done, Miss Bardiston," said Mr. Sprinks, with a peculiarly unamiable and sarcastic expression, when Sissy modestly demanded some beef for stewing. Meanwhile Mrs. Sprinks' eye was glittering upon us. "I can't

give credit forever on what I might call no security at all. I know just how your ma's placed, and I guess most of the tradesmen about do the same."

And Sprinks, muttering something about intending to call "on the lady that afternoon," turned away, while we left the shop in an agony of mind. I forget just how we made out for dinner that day, but I know the meal was partaken of in an awful kind of silence, Mrs. Bardiston starting at the sound of the knocker and Sissy turning deathly white when the little maid came in, whispering, that "Mr. Sprinks was in the sitting-room."

We all three exchanged glances, and then with a great effort Mrs. Bardiston arose and left the room. Cuthbert thrust his hands into his pockets and walked over to the window. Muriel Goodwin, who knew only in a general way that things were going wrong, began audibly to cry, and, singular to say, Sissy did not attempt to check her, but sat leaning her cheek on her hand, and gazing at me with her dark eyes full of misery. What seemed an interminable time to us elapsed before Mrs. Bardiston returned, looking very pale and agitated. In a few words she whispered to Sissy and myself that "Mr. Sprinks meant to do the worst if his bill was not paid in a week's time," and the poor lady added "that she supposed they would all descend upon her now that it had begun."

It was raining in a dismal sort of fashion that afternoon, a mournful kind of drizzle, persistent, although thin and vapory, but I had taken a sudden determination to go up to Little Britton House and find out from Martha Buck-

stone just when Miss Bayard might be expected home. I knew my way perfectly, having now more then once walked past there, especially when I was feeling homesick or depressed; and, making no particular excuse to any body, I put on my waterproof and old hat and hastened out of the house. I had a vague idea that Miss Bayard's return might mean something for poor Mrs. Bardiston and her family; at all events her presence or her counsel would be something, and I walked rapidly, feeling my spirits rise as I neared the well known garden wall with its richly laden boughs bending above and the drawing-room bow-window, whose curtains, to my surprise, I saw were drawn back, the outline of a figure not unlike Miss Bayard's visible within it. My heart bounded with delight when, on being admitted, Priscilla, the maid, informed me that Miss Bayard had returned quite unexpectedly that morning. A moment later and I was in the the drawing-room, half crying and laughing together, as she welcomed me with affectionate cordiality.

CHAPTER XI.

MISS BAYARD TO THE RESCUE.

MARTHA was summoned to take away my wet cloak and hat, and a delicious cup of tea brought to the table in the window, after which I talked fast and eagerly, and to my delight found that one of Miss Bayard's chief reasons for hastening home had been my letter describing the Bardistons' position.

"Do you remember, Helen," she said, in her interested sympathetic way, "the day we went to the Deanery, and I talked to old Lady Dowling about a house of hers over at Britton Bay? I had a plan started in my mind then for assisting the Bardistons to a different kind of living. I would not attempt to help her in a school, for I felt certain, as I told her two years ago, she could not succeed in it. I knew that there would always be just the sort of striving after effect which you see has been the case; but, if she will consent to take this house I speak of, on the terms I can offer, I will do every thing in my power to set them afloat once more. I have always been interested in them, and I believe in Cuthbert's talent. Dr. Fordley, the head-master of the grammar school, is exceedingly interested in the boy, and I'm sure both he and Sissy ought to have a chance, but they never *can* have it while they are all living so far beyond their means."

Miss Bayard's plan was to induce Mrs. Bardiston to take the house, to which a very nice Berlin wool shop was attached, keep up the business, and rent out all but such rooms as she actually required, to lodgers who were always easily found at Britton Bay.

"It can be managed very readily, I think," said Miss Bayard when, half an hour later, we were driving to the Deanery to make final arrangements with Lady Dowling, "for Lady Dowling I am sure would be willing to reserve one room for her own use, as she constantly goes over to the Bay and this would lessen the rent at once. A cousin of Mrs. Wedmore's has been keeping the shop and doing well at it, and as she is going north will be very glad, I am sure, to sell out the fixtures and good will at a moderate price."

Delighted and interested as I was, and pleased to be again going to the grand old mansion whose splendors had often recurred to my mind, I could hardly wait for the time of my return to Albert Villa with such important news. However, the visit proved very absorbing and amusing. Lady Dowling liked nothing better than laying plans whereby she could save money, so that she went into minute details with Miss Bayard, finally agreeing to let the house and adjoining shop for one hundred and fifty pounds a year, forty of which were to be deducted if she could have a certain room in the third story reserved exclusively for her own or any friend's use. "*Of course* with gas, fire, and attendance included, my dear," her ladyship explained, "the weeks the room would not be occupied

would make it pay her handsomely ;" and, Miss Bayard agreeing to act as security if Mrs. Bardiston accepted the terms, we departed to drive to Albert Villa where, having ushered Miss Bayard into the little drawing-room, I flew to summon Mrs. Bardiston and Sissy.

The frame of mind in which Sissy and I remained, in the twilight of the little sitting-room, while her mother and Miss Bayard held a long conference, may be imagined. To my great satisfaction, I found that Sissy was more than ready to accept Miss Bayard's plan with gratitude and delight. Shabby gentility, debts and dunning tradesmen, had no charm for her, and she was naturally fond of housekeeping and a good manager. Indeed, if such had not been the case the household must have long since collapsed. Although little more than sixteen, her birthday having occurred soon after my arrival at Albert Villa, experience had matured her beyond her years, and she was quite capable of managing such a business as Miss Bayard proposed with her mother's protection and assistance.

We were just thinking of lamp-light when the drawing-room door opened and Mrs. Bardiston's step was heard, and a call for Sissy and myself brought us quickly into the drawing-room where Miss Bayard was standing in the window, and Mrs. Bardiston, flushed and radiant, although with some signs of tears about her eyes, poured forth an incoherent sort of story, the substance of which, however, both Sissy and I already knew. In a few moments Miss Bayard had departed after whispering something to me,

about "seeing me very soon," and we three repaired to the sitting-room, where Mrs. Bardiston gave us the particulars of her conversation with Miss Bayard, while we sat about the center table, the lamp-light showing me Sissy's face, for the first time since I had known it, radiant and happy.

Miss Bayard must have managed the whole affair with great tact, and used her persuasive powers to their best advantage, since Mrs. Bardiston was as enthusiastic over the new plan as I could have desired, and without the slightest appearance of pride she announced that "Miss Bayard was good enough to offer a loan which would settle her tradesmen's accounts, before they moved," the only show of feeling being when the question of keeping the shop was under discussion, and Mrs. Bardiston said to me, with a touch of her loftiest manner:

"You know, my dear, that I was not brought up to any thing of the kind, but, as Miss Bayard says, there is *such* a difference in trades, and the Berlin wool has always been considered *most* genteel."

"As Miss Bayard says" came to be, in the course of the next fortnight, a familiar expression, Mrs. Bardiston and Sissy pinning their faith, unreservedly, upon their generous friend, who certainly contrived to give her benefactions as little the air of "charity" as possible. Indeed, I have never seen another human being who conducted what may truly be called her good works on such a perfect system, delicate, and at the same time judicious.

The next morning brought a package for Mrs. Bardiston,

which she opened with trembling fingers and an expression of delight, as three crisp bank notes were produced, Miss Bayard thinking that the money would be less embarrassing than a check. She had obtained from Mrs. Bardiston a general idea of the amount due to Britton-Marsh tradespeople, and the notes sent were sufficient to cover all of this and leave a fair margin for the expenses of moving.

Sissy stipulated that, as she had had to bear the brunt of so much trouble in marketing, she was to be permitted the pride and triumph of paying the bills, and accordingly we sat down with the various pass-books before us, a sheet of fresh paper, and newly sharpened pencils, I in a frame of mind scarcely less exultant than Sissy's, for I was really fond of the Bardistons, and had been taken so unreservedly into their confidence that I took this matter keenly to heart, and shared their intense relief of mind and delight in the new prospect opened before them.

When we had summed every thing up Sissy and I dressed ourselves, as though for a most important social occasion, and sallied forth into the High Street, Sissy declaring that she had not realized how miserably she had been feeling until this moment, nor how perfectly delightful it must be to have no debts.

"The worst of it is," she said, as, linking her arm in mine, she turned in the direction of Mr. Sprinks', "people seem to think when you can't pay you are willfully dishonest. For my part, I can not imagine how people can ever be

happy when they are in debt if they have the money to pay up with."

Sissy's manner on entering Mr. Sprinks' shop was really beautiful to see. She began with the most affable smile and a request for the very finest cut of beef; when he looked dubious she affected not to observe this, but approached Mrs. Sprinks' little window with a careless ease, and handing up the pass-book with a ten pound note, graciously requested a receipt and the change. Both the butcher and his wife were full of obsequious courtesy now, and I am sure Sissy enjoyed saying, with the same smiling, affable manner, that they would only need "to be served a few days longer, as they had taken a house, or were about to take it, in Britton Bay."

The same manner characterized each interview that morning, with the exception of our visit to the kind-hearted dairy woman and the green-grocer. At Mrs. Meggs', Sissy was natural and very communicative, bargaining with the good-hearted woman to supply them with vegetables, twice a week, over at the Bay, while Mrs. Burge and Jane Ann were likewise taken sufficiently into Sissy's confidence to have them understand that a windfall of good luck, though from what source was not told, had come in the Bardistons' way.

Certainly no expedition had been fraught with more pleasure, and we had the delightful prospect, for the next afternoon, of a drive to Britton Bay with Martha Buckstone, in Miss Bayard's own carriage, the object being to inspect the new house and the Berlin wool shop, and to hear from its present owner just what the chances of "business" were.

Meanwhile, I had promised to go to Little Britton House for dinner and an hour's chat with its mistress, and parted from Sissy at the corner of the street which led to the turnpike near which Miss Bayard's home was situated.

CHAPTER XII.

MISS BAYARD was engaged in a business conference with Lady Dowling, and, feeling myself very much at home, I made my way to Martha Buckstone's parlor, where I found her all smiles and welcomes.

"You haven't seen Miss Bayard," the good woman said, as she took my hat and jacket, and laid them carefully away. "Well, she's just been planning for you to stay with us for a few days anyway, while Mrs. Bardiston is doing her moving. Come up stairs with me, my dear, and if you like I'll show you the little room near mine we've been getting to rights for you."

I was only too delighted, as may well be imagined, to follow Martha up to the second story, where she led the way into the daintiest little dimity-hung bower you can fancy, every thing within it being what a young girl would like and appearing especially homelike to me at this moment, wearied as I felt of the domestic confusion which characterized Albert Villa. But what attracted my attention first was the fact that I could see plainly from the windows the White House, and Martha bade me observe one most interesting fact.

"Some one has just moved in," she said; "they came yesterday. Do you see it has quite an air of occupation?"

I looked—saw the windows fronting the gallery were wide open and the shutters flung back in those below. Men seemed to be engaged mowing the lawn, while the great front door appeared to be open.

"Oh, Martha," I exclaimed, "who do you suppose has come there to live? Let's make up a story about them. I shall call it *my* house," I added laughingly, and turning back to find Martha regarding me with something queer in her expression.

"All right, Miss Helen," she said hurriedly, "we'll call it your house, and then we'll watch and find out who the people in it are." I could not have said why, but I was certainly impressed by an idea that Martha knew more of the strange occupants of the White House than she was willing to admit, but she turned the subject so decidedly that I had nothing to do but conjecture in my own mind as to the possibility of my finding elements for a romance in the new comers to my house, while there was certainly enough that was interesting later in the day to discuss with Miss Bayard. At dinner I told her all about our expedition of the morning, and how delighted Sissy had been to settle their household accounts, after which we went into an interesting calculation as to what the Bardistons would need for their removal, and new establishment, I being very much pleased when Miss Bayard said she was "glad to find I had a good little business head on my young shoulders." But I explained to her that mother had always made me her confidant and, since I was at all old enough for the work, I had been her "banker and book-keeper."

Miss Bayard looked at me with an odd expression, as I said this.

"Then I suppose," she said in her gentle way, which prevented the question from seeming at all intrusive, "she has made you careful and accurate in regard to money matters?"

"Oh yes," I answered quickly, "we have to be very particular, especially as mother has to lay by something every year, for, although I am to teach in the school as soon as I am old enough, we can never count on the future too securely, she says, and you know we have no one in the world to do any thing for us," I added, quoting my mother's oft-repeated words when I was inclined to be a trifle extravagant. Again I caught the same curious expression in Miss Bayard's dark blue eyes. But she smiled quickly, finding my gaze so earnestly fixed upon her.

"Then your father had no near relations?" she said.

"I have some cousins in Boston," I answered; "they are very nice indeed, but they are not well off. Their father is a physician but, although he has a large practice, there is such a family to support. Mother would never think of looking to them for any thing, although we are so fond of them and they of us."

The subject was discussed no further, yet it left me with a curious impression that Miss Bayard had some special purpose which I could not divine in her remarks. However, I felt the same sense of silence being necessary where my mother's English life was concerned as had governed me

in conversations with old Miss Vail, but that night the face of her "enemy" was curiously mixed in my dreams of Martha Buckstone, Lady Dowling, and my Boston cousins, an absurd jumble, the result, no doubt, of my conversations during the day. At fifteen, dreams, except in our waking hours, do not count for much, and the next day was full of an absorbing interest, and some excitement, for by one o'clock the carriage from Little Britton house arrived, and a very happy party set forth to inspect what Mrs. Bardiston called "the property" at Britton Bay. It was my first long drive in that enchanting country, and no later experiences, however rich in their variety, have caused those early impressions of delight in the exquisite diversions of hill and dale, flower-bordered road-sides or deep-hearted woodland, to lose their intensity. Again I seem to see that fair summer landscape, its rich greens and bounteous blossoms merging here and there into the grandeur of some stretch of country where the tors dominated, or the cliffs, rising abruptly from the water's edge, showed their gray-blue tones boldly in the brilliant noon-day sun. Now and again we passed the gate-way and lodge of some fine mansion; once Martha bade the coachman stop, that I might gaze up a long straight avenue leading to a gloomy looking mansion where Charles I. had passed a week and later the Prince of Orange had been sumptuously entertained. Through a tiny village almost overhanging the sea we drove, I delighted with its cleanly, primitive aspect, the cottage, quaint and picturesque, every yardway gay with flowers, the shops, smithy, and road-side inn all like a picture of rural prosperity, while, in answer to

some inquiry from Mrs. Bardiston, Martha said in a very impressive tone:

"Oh, yes—this is all Mallerdean property," and I thought she glanced inquiringly in my direction. But the name was totally unfamiliar to me, and I suppose my face expressed this fact, for she added in a less constrained tone, "It all belongs to Sir Henry Paulding."

Another mile took us to the scene of Mrs. Bardiston's future home and occupation. I thought then, and I think now, that Britton Bay was as charming a little watering place as I had ever seen. It had all the gayety of a continental resort and something of the solidity of the English town about it. We drove past the railway station, emerging upon a long, wide roadway curving about the Bay, which sparkled and danced in the sunlight, and to the left of which were terraces with smart-looking little villas or small rows of dwelling houses built along them. Beyond this we came to the principal street of the town, where in some instances the shops were as fine as those of Paris, and there was a decided air of fashion and distinction about every thing, from the costumes of the people walking up and down to the few private houses scattered along it and the gorgeous looking hotel at its lower end which commanded a superb view of the ocean. The winter was the gayest season here, Martha explained, but even now there was an air of joyous prosperity. Above the terraces and villas, the business street and the hotel gardens, there rose cliffs richly verdant at this season and with the brilliant blue of the sky making

a charming framework for this picturesque and light-hearted looking place.

Our destination was in a side street not far from the sea, where the houses were somewhat quainter in architecture than those on the terrace above the beach road, and we speedily recognized the Berlin wool shop with its comfortable residence, the front door to the house being at one side, while the second story or "drawing-room floor" above the shop had wide and projecting windows, with a tiny balcony full of flower boxes, just in front. The shop window presented what Mrs. Bardiston at once pronounced "a most genteel and attractive appearance." It was the period of canvas and wool work, of sofa pillows, rugs, and crochetted afghans, and a brilliant assortment of patterns and samples of the same was displayed, together with a variety of small fancy articles, and some stationery.

The arrival of Miss Bayard's carriage brought the present occupant of the house promptly to the shop door. A bright-faced looking woman, who welcomed us all profusely, and leading the way with Mrs. Bardiston, whose manner was a mixture now of the business woman and retired school-mistress, if such a thing can be imagined, escorted us into what was certainly a very attractive little shop. A comfortable space was carpeted, dividing the two counters; shelves on either side were well laden, and a portion of each counter boxed off with glass, containing sundry embroidered and worked articles for sale, while the lower end of the shop contained a door the upper part of which was glass and which on being opened like that at the

entrance rang a little bell. Behind this was so cosy a shop-parlor that Sissy squeezed my arm, and exclaimed in a delighted whisper, "That it was *too* sweet for any thing." It was a cosy, old-fashioned room large enough for all family purposes and having windows which looked out very pleasantly upon a garden with fruit trees and clambering rose vines against a southern wall. The fireplace looked most inviting and was like that in Martha Buckstone's sitting-room, the very place for cosy tea-drinking, but Mrs. Yarnall, our hostess, hastened to say that there was another sitting-room across the hall, and led the way from a side door to the residence part of the establishment. Here was a narrow hallway, a small front sitting-room somewhat more precise and modern-looking than the shop parlor, but very neat and comfortable, while opening from it was a good-sized pantry with the kitchen in the rear.

"My drawing-room lodgers are out to-day," said Mrs. Yarnall as she led the way up stairs, "so we can have a look at every thing," and she opened the door of the room with the wide projecting window, displaying it with evident pride in its conventional lodging-house "elegancies." There was the usual center table, horse-hair sofa and sprinkling of easy chairs, a carpet gay in design, carefully looped back lace curtains, and the familiar prints of the period on the walls, Frith's "Derby-Day," "The death of Lord Nelson," and a somewhat moldy engraving of the Duke of Wellington, while the chimney-piece presented a variety of objects not unlike those in Martha Buckstone's room.

Adjoining this was a capacious bedroom with a dressing-room beyond, the three comprising what Mrs. Bardiston pronounced "a most elegant drawing-room suite."

Long, long afterwards I recalled the careless curiosity of my first visit to that room. How little I guessed what circumstances would lead to my next standing within it! Nothing can be called chance in this world. Circumstances seem often to combine in a mysterious way leading us to the working out of a providential design, but who shall dare to say that chance guides us to the accomplishment of the Divine Will? Looking back I can not see, from the first link to the last, that my experiences during that most eventful year of my life were not all part of God's plan for me and mine.

CHAPTER XIII.

A HAPPY EVENING.

WE surveyed the rest of the house at our leisure, found that with the exception of a small room, which Mrs. Bardiston would occupy alone, there were two good-sized rooms and one small one, eligible for lodgers, on the third floor, while the attic was well finished off and would suffice for Sissy, Cuthbert, the little Goodwins, and Susan, the maid, there being four rooms in it, which, in spite of a slanting roof, were quite comfortable. Cupboards abounded, and Mrs. Bardiston declared herself thoroughly satisfied. Then we returned to the shop parlor and she decided to remain with Mrs. Yarnall for a talk about the "business," while Martha showed Sissy and myself something of the town.

Sissy was eager to see where she could do her marketing, and we found a number of clean little shops by turning down a street near Mrs. Yarnall's, and then proceeding, zig-zag fashion, up a hilly road, where Martha said she thought the very nicest sort of purchases might be made. "Quite as good," said Sissy, whose spirits were at concert pitch, "as any of the more showy places in the town." And she regarded the wares displayed in various windows with the air, already, of a householder in Britton Bay.

Mrs. Bardiston was quite as satisfied with her discussion

of the business as we had been with the possibilities of the town, and it was decided before we left that if they "came to terms" Mrs. Yarnall was to remain a fortnight and induct Mrs. Bardiston and Sissy into the mysteries of the shop, while for the present at least the drawing-room floor was engaged, so that the only rooms which the Bardistons would have to fill with lodgers were two of those on the third floor, one of course being reserved for Lady Dowling.

Our return to Albert Villa was like a triumphal progress, so happy were the Bardistons and so entirely did I sympathize with them in their good luck! How different the whole house seemed to us as we entered it in the soft summer twilight! Sissy almost alarmed me by her graciousness to the Goodwins; Susan was dispatched to Mr. Sprinks for chops for tea, and to the baker's for muffins, Mrs. Bardiston feeling that the occasion justified such an extravagance, and I may say that from this hour her whole manner changed. Having decided to "go into business," she allowed her air of elegant exclusiveness to fall away and became her natural self, which was kind-hearted, genial, and unembarrassed, while Sissy, whatever her fondness for romance would lead her to desire, seemed to think of nothing so satisfactory as this prospect of freedom from what had been the nightmare of her life—the failure in the school and the harassment of increasing debts.

We were sitting in the cool dusk of the evening after tea, Sissy and I talking, she in eager, low tones confiding to me her plans for life at Britton Bay, and I answering with various suggestions and the most heartfelt sympathy, when we

saw coming across the Common Miss Bayard's footman, Matthew, and of course our attention was promptly diverted to conjecturing his errand. It was a note for me desiring to know whether I would make ready for a little visit to Miss Bayard beginning on the morrow, and would I ask Mrs. Bardiston to come up this evening to Little Britton House and consult about "the property."

Mrs. Bardiston of course was only too delighted to go, and departed in a state of suppressed excitement, while Sissy and I continued our talk for a while, including, by way of being very gracious, Cuthbert and the little Goodwins in it, Sissy answering the children's eager inquiries about Britton Bay with a sort of majesty in her air which, however, did not prevent her giving certain small details.

"I am sure," she remarked at one period of the conversation, "mother will thoroughly enjoy being in the shop, for she has often said that her happiest days were those she spent with an uncle up in London who had a large emporium of wools and fancy work, and you see mother's being so very ladylike and all that will attract the best class of custom to our shop."

Cuthbert ventured a surmise as to how he was to get to school, and was promptly answered by Sissy, who said that he could have a monthly ticket in to Britton-Marsh. "And fine days you will enjoy walking one way," she added.

I would not let the fact that I had the packing of my little portmanteau to attend to to interfere with the usual Latin reading, but on getting out the books and turning up the lamp in the sitting-room I observed that Cuthbert looked

very gloomy. He, of all the family, seemed least elated by the good fortune which had befallen them.

"What's the matter, Bertie," I inquired, putting Virgil down resolutely.

"I'm afraid of this venture," he announced with a dejected manner; "mother takes so little interest in my getting a scholarship, and I'm afraid that once we are over there I will have to make myself," the lad's lip curled scornfully, "generally useful."

"But, Cuthbert," I exclaimed, "Miss Bayard is specially interested in your getting on," and I hastened to tell the boy what she had said of Dr. Fordley's opinion of him. Cuthbert's whole face glowed. There was no question whatever of his intellectual capacity, and I felt certain even then that he would reward Miss Bayard's patronage or consideration and determined to do all that I could to further his interests. The hour sped along; Sissy had already assisted the little Goodwins to bed, and she and I went to my own room for another half hour's chat while I packed my bag, Mrs. Bardiston's return, while this was in progress, giving the final accent of success to our day, for she came in flushed and radiant to tell us that all was settled, Miss Bayard had been "more than liberal and kind," and every thing was settled, and as soon as possible they were to make the move.

"Miss Bayard says, dear Miss Helen," said Mrs. Bardiston in her most affectionate manner, "that as soon as we have moved in you can come back to us. That is until your dear mamma knows her plans."

I was well enough satisfied with this and went to sleep that night, happier than I had felt for many a long day, while the next morning, bright and early, Martha Buckstone arrived to escort me back to Little Britton House, where my welcome was all that could be desired, and Miss Bayard told me at once that she hoped after a week or so at Britton Bay I could return to her for a much longer visit.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN ACCIDENT.

HAS it ever happened to any of my readers, I wonder, to experience a reaction from many personal discomforts, from domestic confusion, and I may say insufficient diet, to the very perfection of household content? If so, such a one may know what I enjoyed in finding myself one of Miss Bayard's family, as she called her household, after the scrambling, chilly existence of Albert Villa. From the first morning—when I awoke to find myself in the sweet-scented little bed, Janet, the house-maid, at my side with a cup of tea, and Martha's figure to be seen through the doorway leading into the sitting-room—a condition of things which warmed and comforted every fiber of me began. The days might have seemed monotonous to some people. To me they flew by, their very routine having its charm, since it was prescribed by my beloved Miss Bayard, and the variations being novel enough to me to seem most diverting.

It was a very quiet household. But every thing about Miss Bayard was quiet, or perhaps I had better say peaceful. We breakfasted at half-past eight, after which the three maids, Matthew, the footman, and Martha assembled in the dining-room and Miss Bayard read short prayers. Then I was free to take my book or my work to Martha's room for

two hours while Miss Bayard either saw people on business or wrote letters. Sometimes she went to the factory end of the town, when I would accompany her. Her visits were generally errands of charity, and I had a means of observing her delicacy and tact, yet withal her prudence in almsgiving. Sometimes Martha and I went for her, to carry medicine or some dainty or money to her pensioners. We dined at half-past one ; then came our drive, or a walk with Martha—a slight lameness in one foot making walking difficult for Miss Bayard. Tea at five o'clock was always the " cosy " meal Miss Bayard had promised, and generally brought together some of her special friends—sometimes girls of my own age, who viewed me as highly privileged—and at eight o'clock there was a cold supper which we lingered over, Miss Bayard and I, she often sitting with her feet on the fender when the evenings were chill enough for a fire, in the cheerful old-fashioned dining-room, into which later trooped the servants for night prayers, after which sometimes, not very often, but on rare occasions, I sat with Miss Bayard in her own room while Martha Buckstone's niece, who was in training for Miss Bayard's maid, brushed out my hostess's long soft hair, in which the gray was already plentifully strewn among the brown. Little as she ever said of herself or her past life, I guessed that the Miss Bayard whom I knew had come to this quiet, peaceful outlook on the world in general—this systematic way of a life which was chiefly for others—through some fiery ordeals ; for patience, she used to say, had been learned—her restfulness was the outcome of much that had been tumultuous.

I had been four days at Little Britton House when, on a certain soft May afternoon, I went over to Albert Villa to see the last of the Bardistons before their departure for Britton Bay. Every thing was in the confusion of moving, but Sissy was in radiant spirits ; she had bidden farewell to all her trades-people, and a new lodger for the third floor had just been secured, which, when I was once more with them, would make the house comfortably full. I stayed and chatted with Sissy in my old room for an hour, and then having arranged to join them at Britton Bay within a day or two, departed, walking home by a circuitous way around the lanes and down a hilly road from which a fine prospect of the sea might be enjoyed. I was standing still, I remember, on this breezy height where the road took a turn, and wondering whether I could go any further, when suddenly the sound of voices attracted my attention, and turning quickly I saw just around the bend of the road an alarming sight.

A small pony carriage had been overturned. The horse was out of the shafts and standing amiably quiet now, whatever he may have been a few moments previous, while a tall, countrified youth eyed him with an air of complete dejection ; but the perplexing feature was the figure of a small and very delicate-looking lad of ten or eleven years of age, who, as I judged, had been thrown out—perhaps injured, The little carriage must have been coming up from the opposite direction, as I had seen nothing of it. I stood still, uttering an exclamation of surprise and alarm, while the little boy turned an appealing glance in my direction.

"Oh what can we do?" he moaned forth. "What can we do?"

I sprang forward and immediately asked the taller lad what had happened. He seemed intensely stupid, but managed to let me understand that he had been driving the little carriage when the horse had bolted, taking fright at something on the roadside, the phaeton was overturned and, he added, gazing stupidly at the child who was still in a crouching attitude,

"I'm afraid Maister Charlie be hurted some."

"Hurt!" I exclaimed. No doubt he is. Poor child!"

"Master Charlie" announced that his ankle pained him. He tried to rise, but turned deathly white and fell back again. Evidently some decisive steps were necessary, but here we were, at least half a mile from town and not a house in sight. However, the pony was quiet enough and the boy had begun to put him back in the traces. I stooped down beside "Charlie."

"Don't move, dear," I exclaimed, gently. "Let me try to lift you up."

The boy turned a pair of dark blue eyes on me and I fancied there was a shade of contempt in his expression.

"You can't lift me," he said, trying to be very manly and dignified, but failing miserably, since each movement seemed to bring him fresh pain.

I laughed heartily by way of encouragement.

"See here," I said, and, putting my arms carefully about his very slight frame, I lifted him as easily as though he had been a baby, and, the elder boy having contrived to get the

horse safely harnessed, I deposited my burden on the soft cushions of the little seat. But something further had to be done.

"Where do you come from?" I asked "Master Charlie's" brilliant charioteer.

"Sir Henry Paulding's," was the answer.

I was no further enlightened by this, but I saw that the poor little lad was so weak that there was danger of fainting and, asking the boy if he could lead the horse, got beside Charlie, whose head drooped onto my shoulder.

"Stop at the first house you come to," I said, imperatively. "He must not go too far. I think there is a cottage at the foot of this hill—I know the woman." For Martha and I had been there once or twice to get clotted cream and new-laid eggs for Miss Bayard.

The boy looked thoroughly aroused by this time and willing to obey my orders, and with many glances at his little master contrived to get us in reasonable time down the hill, where we came in view of a pretty cottage owned by a widow named Meluish, who was one of Miss Bayard's most faithful "poor" friends.

"Stop here," I said, anxiously, and, raising my voice, called to Mrs. Meluish, who hastened out, glad to be of service but decidedly alarmed when she saw Charlie's deathly face on my shoulder.

"It's only a faint," I explained. "But his ankle is hurt. Can we get him in, do you think, and send word to his home?"

Mrs. Meluish was a strong young woman with a pair of

motherly arms, in which she took my still unconscious burden tenderly and without disturbing him. She carried him through her kitchen to the room beyond, where a tall "four-poster" bed stood freshly made with a gay counterpane and cleanly pillows.

"I am thinking a doctor had best come first," she whispered, as she laid the boy carefully down. "Sir Henry Paulding, did you say, miss? Why he's the one that's come back to the White House."

I could not resist an exclamation of surprise.

"Oh then I can easily run there," I said, "and tell them, while the boy goes for the doctor."

"Very good, miss," said Anne Meluish, approvingly. "The doctor's easily fetched if he is at home. I'll tell the lad where to find him."

I felt full of excitement, you may depend, as I darted away, walking at the top of my speed by the shortest cut around back of Miss Bayard's to the gateway of the White House—"my" house, as Martha and I continued merrily to call it.

The avenue looked very much deserted. As I approached the fine entrance of the building I saw signs of animation in the house. Repairing and cleaning were evidently going on, and when a servant opened the door in answer to my somewhat excited knock I saw that the vast hall was filled with odd pieces of furniture moved out of the rooms on either side, while a tall, angular woman, with her head bound up in a silk handkerchief, was giving directions in a high voice to two or three servants.

She turned on seeing me and came forward with a polite enough manner, but evident annoyance at being disturbed. I briefly explained my errand.

"Hurt! thrown out!" she exclaimed, excitedly. "Oh why did I trust him to that stupid Peter! Where is he? Jackson"—this to the butler—"order the carriage at once. Mr. Charles is hurt! Quickly! Oh, thank you so much, my dear; perhaps you won't mind coming back to show me just where he is. Dear me!"

The poor lady was in such evident distress I could not think of leaving her, and I knew that Miss Bayard would approve of my remaining; but in the few moments which elapsed while the carriage was being brought around and she went away to put on her things, I wondered what relation she was to little Charles. My ideas of a mother made me think the relationship could not be so near and tender, but she was so genuinely concerned and unhappy that I felt certain at all events that she loved him dearly.

She came back dispersing directions right and left against her return, and all the household impressed me as deeply agitated by this accident to the boy, who was, I fancied, Sir Henry Paulding's son.

When we were seated in the carriage driving toward Anne Meluish's cottage my companion introduced herself.

"I haven't found out who you are yet, my dear," she said, hurriedly, "I am Charles's governess—Nettleship, my name is—and I am all the more anxious because his uncle, Sir Henry, is away and has left me in entire charge of every thing."

I murmured something intended, I suppose, to express my sympathy, and Miss or Mrs. Nettleship said little more until we reached the cottage, where a young surgeon, Dr. Evans, whom I had seen at Miss Bayard's, was waiting in the little kitchen with a face which betrayed at once how serious a "case" he considered it.

"It may be nothing very much, madam," the doctor said, gravely. "But the child must not be moved to-night; any way, I would not answer for the consequences. His back seems to trouble him, and his ankle is broken."

Miss Nettleship began to wring her hands.

"We'll make him comfortable, miss," put in Anne Meluish, consolingly, "and you, too, if you'll stay."

It had to be done, and Miss Nettleship at once expressed her thanks and something complimentary about the cleanliness of the little cottage. Charlie had returned to full consciousness, but he seemed in much pain and with difficulty had been put into bed. I offered my services again, but poor Miss Nettleship, who seemed very unhappy, thanked me and asked where I lived. I told her; she listened in some surprise.

"I had no idea Miss Bayard lived here," she exclaimed, but explained nothing further. However, she desired me to tell Miss Bayard that Matilda Nettleship was at the White House, governess to Mr. Charles Germaine, Sir Henry Paulding's nephew.

The message burned in my brain and seemed ready to dance from my lips as I hastened home, glad that there seemed a prospect of seeing more of the poor little boy and

"my" house, but wondering, too, how Miss Bayard would receive my story.

She was in what she called the "garden-window" of the drawing-room, and I fairly flew upstairs, eager to tell my news. I shall never forget her face as I gave it. Even in the half-lights of the room I saw it pale and flush, and she rose trembling to her feet.

"Sir Henry Paulding—here!" she repeated, and quickly added, "Why, this boy, then, must be Barbara's child."

I stood still looking at Miss Bayard, scarcely knowing what to say. I appreciated the fact that she was unnerved and excited, but knew not what to do or say.

"I don't know," I said, finally, in a stupid fashion. Miss Bayard turned to the window, gazing across the gardens and road to where the Florentine-looking house was shining in the sunset glow among its trees and gardens.

"So near!" I heard her half whisper. "What a strange life this is, to be sure."

CHAPTER XV.

CHARLIE GERMAINE.

MISS BAYARD had a conference with Martha, the immediate result being a note to Miss Nettleship at the White House, and all of that evening I found it hard to restrain my curiosity as to who these people were, why their presence in Britton-Marsh was so agitating to my hostess, and whether there would be any reason for my not seeing the poor little boy again.

Miss Bayard and I lingered rather longer than usual in the drawing-room, while she made me give her every detail of the accident, but when I ventured to say, "Have you ever seen him, Miss Bayard?" her answer, "Only when he was two or three months old," conveyed no particular information, of course—at least satisfied none of my curiosity.

"But Sir Henry Paulding—the uncle?" I said, a little timidly.

Miss Bayard was leaning back in her own special easy-chair, her eyes fixed upon the fire, but at this she flashed a sudden look of interrogation or perplexity.

"Is it possible—" she began, looked at me more searchingly, and then turned the subject in a way that made it impossible for me to ask questions without appearing impertinent. I stayed with her while her hair was being brushed, and, as usual, amused myself turning over the trinkets on a

little jewel-stand—a queer collection of odds and ends with here and there the flash of something like a rare gem. But Miss Bayard's special jewels, of course, were under lock and key, and Martha had long promised to ask permission to show them to me.

Miss Bayard watched me, smiling at my evident satisfaction in slipping the rings on my fingers and holding up the other ornaments to catch the light.

"There are some jewels in my strong box you ought to have, Helen," she said, presently, "they belonged to your grandmother—amethysts. Perhaps I'll show them to you, and you may have them for your sixteenth birthday if you are with me."

I am sure my eyes danced with delight.

"Oh, Miss Bayard," I exclaimed, "how enchanting! I shall be sixteen on July 5th. I hardly think I'll be here then."

"We don't know what may turn up," said Miss Bayard, promptly. "I am inclined to think your mother will remain some weeks longer with the Hills in Russia. You know in her last letter she spoke of the extremely delicate health of the younger daughter and how much she disliked leaving her, and," added Miss Bayard, with a smile, "I think she is satisfied now that her little girl is in good hands."

Much that might be new and interesting seemed to me, when I went to bed that night, about to open in my life.

Lying still in the darkness of my own room I could, by turning my head very slightly, see the lights twinkling in one or two rooms of the White House. Had they contrived,

I wondered, to bring Charlie home? and, if so, were these his rooms?

Morning, nowever, brought the answer to these questions. On going down to the dining-room I found Miss Bayard standing thoughtfully in the window with an open letter in her hand.

"Helen," she said, very gravely, and laying her hands upon my shoulder—a fashion she often had when saying any thing of importance to me—"I am going to allow you to do something entirely on my own responsibility, and you must remember that I am obliged in certain instances to use my own judgment, as your mother is too far away to be consulted about a point which needs prompt decision. Here is a letter from Miss Nettleship asking that you may spend part of to-day with the poor little boy who can not leave Anne Meluish's cottage perhaps for many days. It seems that he has asked for you, and Miss Nettleship and the doctor think you might be able to keep him amused and quiet. Now, I foresee that this will lead to a friendship with strangers, but I am tolerably certain, my love, that you have enough character and firmness to—well—to meet any emergency that may arise. At all events," continued Miss Bayard, with more rapidity and decision in her tone, "it seems to me that I have no right to prevent your making pleasant friends; I am sure I think no harm can come of it."

I felt equally certain that only pleasure could result, and I ate my breakfast in quite an exhilarated mood, eager to run up to Martha's room for a few moments' discussion of what seemed to me a very important invitation.

GEORGE·WHARTON·EDWARDS· 1887

Martha, I must say, appeared scarcely less excited than I was myself, and we had hard times, both of us, getting my things together in the proper order and in making me look really presentable for the occasion.

Miss Bayard decided that Martha had better walk with me to the cottage, and we set off about ten o'clock, I carrying a couple of my best-beloved story-books, thinking that little Charlie might like me to read aloud.

It was a relief to find on entering Anne's kitchen that the doctor did not consider young Master Germaine's injuries at all dangerous, but as there seemed a slight tendency to feverishness he had decided that the little boy would be better off, for a day or two at least, in the Meluish cottage, which was fresh and cleanly and well-ventilated; a servant from the White House had been sent down to relieve Anne of all unnecessary care, while Miss Nettleship, after staying the night through with her little charge, had gone home for an hour's rest.

"He's asked for you, miss, half a dozen times—poor little young gentleman!" said Anne, sympathetically, while she took my hat and jacket. "He seemed to feel as though the very sight of you would do him good."

I hastened into the adjoining room, where Charlie was propped up in bed, a very pale little person indeed: but his eyes brightened at sight of me.

"There!" he exclaimed, "I am so glad you came! I told Miss Nettleship she must bring you. Isn't it horrid to think I have to stay here two or three days?"

"Oh, I think it very nice," I answered, sitting down in a

huge chintz easy-chair which was drawn near to the bed. "Such a dear old cottage and such a pretty room! Isn't it, Charlie?"

"H-m, ye-es," said young Master Germaine, surveying the room critically.

It had the elements common to English cottages of its class: windows with swinging latticed panes, corner cupboards set deeply in the wall, and furniture which to-day would set many a lady of fashion wild with envy and delight. The chest of drawers was of oak, polished and dark with age. The claw-footed table on which some of Charlie's remedies were set forth had belonged to Anne's great-grandmother, and the very bed in which Charlie looked such a little mite would bring a good prize in these days of antiquarian research.

"Miss Nettleship will be here directly," said Charlie, with his eyes fixed upon my face, "and I will tell what you will have to do. You must tell her to go away and you will take care of me."

I had to laugh, for, in spite of what was very evident, that Master Germaine was accustomed to have his own way, I hardly felt it likely that I should carry such a point with the governess.

"She'll go if you tell her to," said Charlie, with an old-fashioned manner that was very funny. "She hates to be bothered, I know. And she's got the toothache dreadfully. I heard her telling the doctor so last night. She's pretty good, and, of course, she's kind: but she's such an old fusser.

Uncle Harry always tells her, though, that she must do just what I like."

This appeared to me rather an amusing arrangement between a pupil, or young charge, certainly not more than ten years of age, and a middle-aged governess.

"Do you always have your own way?" I inquired.

"Oh, generally," said Charlie. "Uncle Harry always lets me have every thing. He's the goodest—goodest—person in the whole world. He says he's like a father to me. But I don't believe any fathers ever were half as good. Was yours?" he asked, suddenly.

"I never saw my father," I answered. "At least I can't remember him, for I was only a tiny little thing when he died."

To my surprise Charlie's face brightened visibly at this rather mournful piece of intelligence.

"Why, isn't that nice?" he said, affably. "It's just like me. My father died when I was a baby; that's why my Uncle Harry brought me up. Who took care of you?"

I now sketched something of my life in America for Charlie's benefit. He seemed greatly interested, and plied me with questions at once about American boys and their sports, etc.

"When I go to Eton," he answered, "I intend to do every thing that will make me powerful and strong. My cousin Geoff is at Eton, and he is a regular giant—a first-class sort of a Hercules, the fifth form call him." He stopped suddenly with a quiver of distress in his little face. "Oh, do you suppose I am hurt forever?" he inquired.

"Oh, I don't think it is possible," I answered, quickly. "Why, the doctor says you can be moved to-morrow or the next day, and then we'll hope you'll get strong and well."

"Miss Nettleship is going to write to Uncle Harry at once," said Charlie. "He's at Leghorn, and if it is serious at all she says he will come right home. You see, it would be a dreadful thing for any thing to happen to my back, for I have to be a soldier."

He spoke, poor little lad! as though the defense of the kingdom might depend upon him.

"There always has been a Charles Germaine in the army," said this little English boy with pride and decision. "If you ever go to Mallerdean you can see Charles Germaine of Her Majesty's Tenth, who was shot at Blenheim, and Charles Germaine who was in the Crimea—that was my father."

"Where is Mallerdean?"

He looked at me a little queerly for a moment, as though I had betrayed some unpardonable ignorance, but he said presently in a cheerful voice,

"Oh, of course—you are from America and you don't know. Mallerdean is Uncle Harry's largest place. It isn't far from Britton Bay. We are only staying at the White House because some repairs are going on at Mallerdean. I shouldn't wonder"—he lowered his voice to the most confidential whisper—"I shouldn't wonder if Uncle Harry were going to be married, although you must not say any thing about it, because it's dreadful—Miss Nettleship

says—to spread gossip, and she and I only talk of it as gossip."

It was the hardest thing possible for me to keep from laughing, such a comical mixture was there in the boy of shrewd sense and childishness, so quaint and old-fashioned was he and yet so irresistibly fascinating. Such a little darling! He had a face which might well have been painted and hung upon the wall with other "Charles Germaines" who had served their country; delicate and high-bred and, in spite of extreme childishness, full of manly purpose. The eyes were darkest blue, clear and searching in their glance; the hair, though rather long, waved like a little cavalier's and gave no effeminacy, only added picturesqueness to the pretty boyish face.

I was afraid of overtiring Charlie, and, seeing the carriage from the White House coming down the road, made this an excuse to slip out for a moment into the kitchen, where presently Miss Nettleship arived with a hamper of all sorts of delicacies, such as I doubt if the little cottage had ever seen before.

She still had the same anxious and fretted expression of the night before, but I learned later that this was habitual, and that Charlie's governess was really one of the kindest-hearted, most good-humored of women.

"Oh, my dear," she exclaimed, on seeing me, "I am so much obliged to you for coming. I am sure you have kept Charlie entertained. Mrs. Meluish, I hope you make Hannah (the maid who had been staying there since the accident) very useful, and now she can get Master Ger-

maine's lunch ready. I brought every thing I could think of."

We very soon had a tempting little tray prepared for the invalid, and then Mrs. Meluish and Hannah set out a table laden with delicacies for Miss Nettleship and myself; but perhaps the nicest part of it was the fragrant cup of tea Anne made at the bright little fire, while the sanded kitchen with its bright dresser and perfectly cleanly appointments, made as attractive a dining-room as I have ever known.

Miss Nettleship pressed me to eat all sorts of things; talked about Charlie, about Sir Henry, about Miss Bayard, all in a sort of good-humored jumble which I supposed she imagined I understood. They had been traveling abroad, it appeared, for two or three years, and as soon as Mallerdean was in order she and Charlie were to take up their permanent abode there.

"Sir Henry, I suppose, will always travel more or less," said Miss Nettleship. "And, to tell you the truth,"—lowering her tone—"Charlie is so very delicate that we can't let him have a tutor or think of going to Eton for some time to come. All of his father's family have died of consumption, and we have to take every precaution to keep him strong and well, and for that reason it may seem to you, my dear, that he is a trifle spoiled or exacting."

"I think he is a perfect darling," I answered, so warmly that Miss Nettleship, who was evidently very fond of her little charge, brightened with pleasure.

The doctor, coming in a few moments later, declared that my visit had done his little patient no harm, therefore it

was decided that if I chose to do so I might remain for the afternoon. General conversation seeming to languish, about four o'clock Charlie asked me whether I could not tell a story, and so it came about that I began with him a series of Martha's tales. I told him the various objects whose history I had heard. The work-box, the brocaded silk, the curl, and the topaz ring. Charlie chose for that afternoon the work-box story.

"You see," I said, "it really ought to come before that of the brocaded gown, because Miss Bayard bought the box the very day that she first wore the dress. It appears that she was in London with a party of friends. She was visiting at some very fine house—I don't remember just where it was—but they were all going to a party. Now, it so chanced that some American friends of Miss Bayard's arrived early in the morning and asked her to accompany them to a sort of show or bazar which was taking place somewhere a little way out of town. Miss Bayard had agreed to sit for her portrait that afternoon in the brocaded dress, and with her hair in curls, but, as she feared she might be late, sent a messenger to the artist, who was a great friend of hers, to say where she was going, and to ask him to meet her there and arrange for another sitting."

I then detailed all that Martha had told me of the expedition—the sights that the party saw on the way—bringing the story up to what I presumed was its important climax.

"The bazar was held in an immense building, and there were any number of booths or stalls where people, some of whom were dressed in the costumes of different nations, sold

objects of more or less value—things, for instance, like the work-box. Miss Bayard was anxious to hurry her party on to meet the artist and his sister. She thought more of them, Martha says, than almost any body in the world. But in some curious way Miss Bayard got separated from the others. The crowd was so great, and there was so much jostling and pushing, that she was very much alarmed to find herself alone in such a throng, and was looking about anxiously to know what to do or say when a woman at one of the tables spoke to her, and asked her what was the matter. Miss Bayard immediately explained her difficulty, and the woman very good-naturedly offered to go in search of the lost party, as she knew the intricacies of the building so well. They set off, but an hour's search proved entirely fruitless, and Miss Bayard, ready to cry with vexation, returned to the woman's stall, where, just as a matter of politeness, she purchased the work-box, and then, thinking it best to return home, took a cab and hastened back to her friend's house. Now, all of this, Charlie," I said with an almost unconscious imitation of Martha's manner, " may sound very trifling, but do you know that just the fact of missing those people that day led to what Martha says was the greatest trial of Miss Bayard's life. For the artist and his sister, who had agreed to meet her, never received her message, and business called them away suddenly the next day. The picture never was painted, and one thing after another combined to separate these old friends. Miss Bayard heard that the others supposed her merely careless of her appointment with them, and so it

went on and on. When she gave Martha the work-box, she said to her, very sadly:

"'Martha, this is the souvenir of the most mistaken day of my life.'"

I paused suddenly, a little afraid that I might be betraying some of Miss Bayard's confidences, but Martha had told the story very freely, and evidently with no knowledge whatever of any deeper significance to be attached to it, and Charlie was deeply interested.

As I have said, this was the precedent for all the other stories which during the next week I told Charlie from time to time. Before I left him that evening it was understood that I should return on the morrow, and every day until he could be moved.

I went back full of "talk" for Miss Bayard, who listened keenly to every thing I had to say, and I really believe it was only because other points seemed more interesting that I forgot to tell her that I had related the work-box story to Charlie.

The days brought him much freedom from pain, but when on a certain fine afternoon I started for the cottage for the last time—we were to move him to the White House in the capacious carriage of the establishment—I was well aware that the doctor felt his final recovery would be a tedious affair, and also that Sir Henry Paulding had written to announce his speedy return.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE AMETHYSTS.

CHARLIE had become very fond of the Meluish Cottage, and almost regretted, I fancied, that he was obliged to leave it; but there was novelty in the going home, and, comfortably curled up on pillows opposite Miss Nettleship and myself, he looked very cheerful as we drove slowly back to the White House, whose interior, rich I doubted not, in its appointments, I was anxious to see.

But I was disapppointed to find it all light in color, airy in design, as Italian looking a place as though it fronted on the Adriatic; and as we followed Charlie, who was being carried up-stairs and through a long hall with an effect of pink and white in its frescoes, Miss Nettleship explained that it had all been designed for Charlie's elder sister, who had faded out of life years before.

The room into which the little lad was taken carried out this impression of light and fancifulness in appointments. Every thing was in the Italian and French order. The wood-work was white, the ceiling a marvel of flying cupids and rose wreaths, and the hangings daintiest chintz—shepherdesses in pink carrying themselves, crook in hand, on a ground of pale gray. The furniture was charming. Wicker-work and bamboo were then novelties, but the chairs and tables in this room had been brought from India long

before to please the fancy of Charlie's poor young sister, and they added to the effect of a light simplicity, of prettiness suited to a girl, which the room conveyed.

I was delighted. It seemed to me I had never seen any thing half so pretty, and while they were settling Charlie on a deep capacious lounge I moved about softly, so evidently admiring, I suppose, the objects I encountered that he saw my satisfaction, and so called out:

"There, Helen! You like it? O Miss Nettleship —she thinks it is a pretty room! I am so glad!" And I hardly think dear little Charlie could have said any thing to please me more. There is one thing I wish to say just here. People have said since that they could not understand how I cared so much for the life of a mere child: that they could not understand why I cared so much when something happened; but years later, old as I am now, I realize how deep and true was my affection for Charlie, and, child as he was, how much there was in his nature and character which appealed to my finest sentiments. He was only a child, of course, and yet I loved him as I have scarcely ever loved any thing else on earth. Something there was about or in him so high-minded, so personally attractive, that he seems to me, even now, strongly identified with my living, daily life.

"Why, Charlie," I exclaimed, "I think this room is lovely." I turned to him and added, laughing, "You ought to feel like a little prince, my dear, in such a place."

He regarded me very gravely.

"What will I do when I am in barracks?" he said solemnly, "or perhaps on the field of battle?"

We exchanged a look—Miss Nettleship and I. Her eyes filled suddenly with tears, and she turned away toward the window murmuring to me,

"God help him," and she added under her breath, "It would kill Sir Henry, I believe, if he lost this one."

Charlie clung to my neck when I said good-by, and only allowed me to go on condition that I would return early the next day. I knew Miss Bayard would allow me to do this, and so I readily promised. Then I ran away down the bright hall and the staircase and was soon in the "garden window" with Miss Bayard, who I judged had been watching our entrance into the White House and was ready enough to hear from me all that I had seen. When I told her of the beautiful room into which Charlie had been carried she sighed softly.

"I never saw the White House," she said, absently, "until I came here, but I knew it belonged to the Germaines. That room must have been for poor little Muriel. She was a long time in Italy, and always liked, so I was told, whatever was bright and cheerful about her. Poor Henry!" Her voice was low and sad. We were silent for a moment. Then she said more cheerfully,

"Now, Helen, after supper we will take out the amethysts. You see I was right. Your mother does not intend to leave Russia for some weeks yet, so that I do believe I can count on your being here for your birthday."

I had that morning received a long letter from my

mother. Stella Hill had been in wretched health, and her father had begged of mother to remain if possible a few weeks longer, and take his daughters to a country place not far from St. Petersburg, the air of which, it was hoped, would do them good, so mother wrote that if I was contented she would remain, leaving it to Miss Bayard to decide what was best for me to do. My dear friend had evidently thought the matter over, and I agreed with her in feeling that it would be best for me not to break away so suddenly from the Bardistons, but to return for a few days to them, after which I might with an easy conscience take up my residence until mother's return at Little Britton House. Mother said she was interested in my account of Charlie Germaine, and bade me ask Miss Bayard whether Sir Henry Paulding was one of the Gloucester Pauldings. I asked the question, but Miss Bayard stared at me for a few moments in blank surprise. Then she said slowly and anxiously,

"Why, I do not understand this. However, tell your mother when you write that I think he is."

And the subject, like all others of its kind, was peremptorily dropped.

What girl of fifteen could be impervious to such ornaments as Miss Bayard displayed before me after supper! I think I was only moderately fond of dress, but the mere fact that I had never owned a jewel, and rarely seen any, only heightened my interest in the birthday gift I was to have, and which we inspected in Miss Bayard's dressing-room,

Martha carrying in the large desk or box in which these stones were kept.

"Your grandmother brought this box with her from France," said Miss Bayard, "and a few years ago, just before her death, she gave it, with the amethysts, to me."

"I thought my grandmother died years and years ago," said I.

Miss Bayard looked thoughtful for an instant.

"Your own grandmother did," she said. "This was your mother's step-mother, my cousin."

The words "step-mother" seemed to be so inclusive that I asked no more questions, but I will say here that I was glad to find that, although a proud and reserved woman, my grandfather's second wife had done her duty by his children in every way she understood.

The box was a cumbersome affair. In old times, so said Miss Bayard, it had been used for holding private papers, and the lock was a difficult one to manage. But the key worked at last. The cover was raised and my birthday gift lay sparkling before me!

I uttered a cry of delight as I lifted the necklace of sparkling stones up, and flew to the mirror, girl-like, to try them on at once. They made a shining little circlet about my throat, and I lifted a candle in my hand the better to see and admire the reflection of my dazzling self.

The picture of that moment comes back easily as I write. The large room with its shadowy corners and its spots of light, Miss Bayard's tall, graceful figure just at my shoulder, my own girlish self, the face in the mirror, eager, happy,

and impatient all together, and the stones shining on my neck almost like living things, and to me doubly fascinating in that they seemed like a link from that mysterious past to which my mother belonged and of which I knew so little.

"Now we'll put them back until the birthday," said Miss Bayard, good-naturedly. "Then on that day you can wear them as long as you please."

We laughed over this, and when I went to my room I was very glad to think of something new to tell Charlie, and I decided promptly that on the birthday in question if I were here I would take the jewel box across to the White House and let him enjoy my present with me.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BERLIN BAZAR.

THE Bardistons understood before I started for Britton Bay that I was to return to Miss Bayard after a week's stay with them, and I thought it an indication of their feeling well content in the new home, that my withdrawal from the family circle was taken in such good part. On a certain Wednesday I started, Martha placing me safely in the train while Sissy Bardiston was to meet me at the end of my short journey. It was a glorious morning. June had come in, deepening every tint in the landscape, enriching all its summer loveliness, and I thought, as on the first occasion of my seeing it, Britton Bay with its shining water, verdant slopes, and fair blue sky was the most fascinating of all places I had known.

Sissy met me at the station, the little Goodwins with her, and I was received with every demonstration from all three, while in the first moment I observed how improved Sissy was in appearance. Indeed her whole manner was so bright and cheerful that I could scarcely realize she was the same girl who two months before, had greeted me with such a dejected hopeless kind of manner.

"Isn't it spendid weather!" exclaimed Sissy as, having given my portmanteau in charge of a boy, we started to walk up to the new house. "The band plays this afternoon, and

we must go and hear it. But oh, there is such a heap to talk about."

"How do you like the Berlin wool business?" I inquired, feeling sure that keeping shop must be fascinating occupation.

"Immensely," said Sissy, turning her dark happy eyes upon me, "and you don't know how comfortable we are, and mother thoroughly enjoys keeping house. We are thinking of taking a second servant, because you see we have to cook for the lodgers."

A few moments more, and we had turned up Bath Street, on the corner of which was the Bardistons' new abode, and we entered through the shop, that I might see how bright it looked, Sissy's really good taste having improved decidedly on Mrs. Yarnall's methods of arrangement, while the little shop parlor, with a great jar of freshly cut flowers on the center table, and materials for a piece of Sissy's wool work strewn about, looked very bright and home-like.

Indeed, on going across the hall, and into the sitting-room where Mrs. Bardiston appeared coming hastily from the kitchen, I was at once impressed with the cleanliness and the comfortable air of every thing so different from the painful sort of pretention of Albert Villa, while Mrs. Bardiston appeared quite as bright at Sissy.

"My dear Miss Helen," she exclaimed, shaking hands warmly with me, "how glad we are to see you; you have no idea how cosy and comfortable we are, and I am delighted to think of making even these few days really pleasant for you."

I assured the kind hearted woman that I was bent on thoroughly enjoying myself, and I intended to get some fun for myself out of the shop, since I might never again have such an opportunity; so as soon as I had laid aside my things in a cosy little room up-stairs whence I could see the Bay, rippled over and sparkling as though with a myriad of jewels in the sunshine, I insisted upon Sissy's allowing me to accompany her to the shop parlor, where, during this part of the day, as she explained, she was on duty, while her mother attended to various household duties. I knew something of wool work—could fill in a canvas pattern quite creditably, and I insisted upon selecting something as my first purchase from the shop which I could make up into a foot-stool for Miss Bayard. This accomplished, we sat down very comfortably at the center table, and as I worked Sissy told me about the lodgers.

"We have an old admiral and his two daughters in the drawing-room floor," she said, instinctively lowering her voice as she mentioned these august personages. "There are two small bed-rooms, you know, on the second floor which we did not go into that day. The young ladies have those. The admiral has a terrific temper ; but the young ladies are rather nice—stiff, of course, as pokers. They sail into the shop and make a purchase worth about six-pence as though we ought to put the money away under a glass case, because they have held it in their aristocratic fingers once upon a time."

I laughed and begged of Sissy to let me wait on these exclusive young ladies if a chance occurred.

"Oh, there will be one," said Sissy, with a sniff, and bending forward in a very business-like manner to match her wools, "for Miss Ethel said she would call to-day for some blue wool she ordered. Mrs. Yarnall left yesterday, and she was to send it down from London. Miss Ethel is not *quite* so haughty as Miss Lesley."

"Lesley," I echoed. "Why, I wonder if those are the cousins little Charlie Germaine has told me so much about!"

Sissy was all attention, and dropped her wool work to listen, after remarking,

"Well, I shouldn't wonder. Sir Henry Paulding was here a little while ago, for the day at Mallerdean, and they dined there."

"Yes," I answered, "he came over to the White House for an hour or two last week, but I did not see him."

And my mind ran back to the day when Sir Henry Paulding came and went unseen, it would appear, by any of his household, although Charlie tried, he assured me, to get me word in time to meet his beloved uncle. Charlie was still unable to leave his sofa, and on days that I could spend with him we used to sit together in the pink and gray room by the hour, Miss Nettleship sometimes joining us with her work, sometimes by ourselves with only the firelight and the afternoon shadows to listen to our chatter, which was on all manner of topics, grave and gay, martial and peaceful. On this occasion we had been a whole afternoon by ourselves.

"I told Uncle Harry all about you," said Charlie, "and he thinks you must be an awful jolly girl. I told him most

of the stories," he continued. "The work-box story interested him very much."

"And will he come back again?" I inquired.

"Oh, very soon," said Charlie. "He's just gone up to London to see some of the people who have been doing up Mallerdean, and he's decided, we are to go over there in October. Geoff will be home then and the Lesleys are coming and—oh!" Charlie sighed as though the idea of so much company was just a trifle wearisome. "I wish you'd come too. I told Uncle Harry we must beg of you to come."

"And what did he say?"

"He said I might do my best, and tell you you would be heartily welcome."

But even now, when the conversation recurred to my mind, such a prospect seemed too remote for consideration, and I did not even allude to it to Sissy, fearing to start the train of her imaginative fancies in regard to my future. But it would be fun to see the Miss Lesleys without their knowing I was Miss Bayard's or Charlie's friend, while it would be almost as good as one of Martha's stories to give Charlie a history of our encounter. So, I remarked to Sissy that I hoped the exclusive Miss Ethel would soon make her appearance.

"I will show you where the wool she will ask for is to be found," said Sissy, leading the way into the shop, and there designating a newly arrived package of pale blue Shetland. "I am just beginning to imitate successfully Mrs. Yarnall's way of opening a package of wool and displaying it

to a customer," added Sissy, proceeding to give me a specimen of her skill, which I declared looked exceedingly businesslike.

It was well that I had received my instructions, for five minutes later Admiral Lesley's carriage had stopped before the door, and the young ladies, alighting, entered the shop before going to their rooms.

They were tall, high-featured, blonde girls, of any age between eighteen and twenty-five, with what I considered a very rude way of staring at one while they spoke. The one I judged to be the younger asked for the wool in a sweet-toned but imperious voice, and while I, feeling rather indignant at their manner, produced the package, forgetting even a feeble imitation of Sissy's manner, I observed that both sisters were regarding me with unusual interest, or I had better say curiosity, since there was nothing particularly friendly in their expression. Sissy, for want of some occupation, was busy turning over some knitting needles in one of the counter drawers, and I made an excuse to approach her, and while I was pretending to make some inquiry concerning the wool I distinctly heard Miss Ethel say in a half whisper to her sister: "Did you ever see such a resemblance?" and Miss Lesley's quick "To whom?" was answered by "Fanny Dowling of course," and I returned to my self-imposed duty with a decided increase of color in my cheeks, and some curiosity concerning the "Fanny Dowling" whom I was supposed to resemble. I have often remarked that the very best bred English woman will allow her curiosity to overrule almost every

other sentiment, and so I can understand how it was that the Miss Lesleys so forgot themselves as to linger after their purchase was complete, for the older one to say to me,

"Would you mind telling us your name?"

"I am an American," I answered, with as much dignity as possible, and holding my head very high; "my name is Helen Glenn."

"Oh, thanks very much," said Miss Lesley, with a staccato sort of smile; "we could not help noticing your very striking resemblance to a young friend of ours, but of course you could scarcely be any relation."

They swept out of the store, and Sissy, darting an indignant glance at the retreating figures, exclaimed,

"I declare, Helen, you've missed your opportunity! Why didn't you say that you knew old Lady Dowling very well?"

"I said "Nonsense," but all the same I felt a disagreeable sense of having been snubbed by the Miss Lesleys, who evidently looked down upon me for serving in a shop, but after all Charlie would enjoy the story I felt sure, and I would try to imitate their very superior manner when I repeated the brief interview to him. Other customers came and went; one o'clock brought Susan out to take Sissy's place, while we went in to enjoy a dinner such as Albert Villa never could have known. Every thing good in quality and, though simple in variety, well cooked and cosily served. Mrs. Bardiston seemed in excellent spirits, and I saw that she was in her proper place, now, keeping house and shop

together, attending to the culinary department with a zest, since she had her lodgers to please, and finding no time for lamentations over that luxurious past in which she and her sister Maria had not been able to attend the same ball, owing to the existence of but one muslin gown. The neighbors, she informed me, had been very friendly and were "exceedingly nice people."

"Mr. Roberts, the chemist over the way," she said, with the same superior tone she had used when referring to former acquaintances of greater social magnitude, "has called with his wife, and very agreeable people they seem. As well as Mr. and Mrs. Banks, who have the large fancy goods shop you may have noticed in Devon Street. I foresee many pleasant evenings for Sissy and myself during the winter."

I declared myself greatly interested and pleased, with such a prospect for my friends, and when we all started out for a walk on the Parade Pier where we should hear the band play Mrs. Bardiston impressed upon Sissy that, "although, of course, Miss Bayard might prefer that no introductions were made, she must be sure and point out to me any of their new accquaintances."

An injunction which Sissy did not disregard, for no sooner had we mingled with the gayly-dressed and animated crowd of people who were assembled on or near the Pier than she hastened to let me know who was this one and that; but the music pleased me much more than gazing after young Miss Roberts or Mr. Joe Banks; and, seeing that Sissy was anxious for a few words with her new friends, I begged

her to leave me on one of the comfortable rustic seats near the band pavilion, while she accepted the youngest Miss Roberts' invitation to walk up and down for a little while.

Left thus, I gave myself up to quiet enjoyment of the scene and the music. Below the terrace on which I was seated, the beach stretched gleaming golden in the afternoon light, with the water rippling towards it and stretching to the horizon, dotted here and there with white sails that seemed outlined against the dense blue of the sky, while the shore which curved about this portion of the bay presented a picture sparkling with life and brilliancy, verdant with the varied colors and deep green of June. I certainly felt the need of no companionship beyond what the elements of such a picture on such a day afforded me, and the delightful strains of music from the pavilion acted like a fascinating accompaniment to my thoughts, which were of all the happy things in my life, the pleasure I felt in being with Miss Bayard or in my sweet companinship with little Charlie —of knowing that mother was well cared for and enjoying travel, which, for all our quiet life, I felt sure she loved, while last, but by no means least, was the satisfaction in seeing the Bardistons so entirely happy and in a fair way to prosperity.

The band was performing a selection from what was then a new opera, "Dinorah," and I never hear the music of its "Shadow Dance" without that smiling picture unrolled before my gaze coming back to mind, and I seem to see myself as I rose, and still keeping Sissy's distant figure in view, moved towards the cliff, the dainty measure of the

music following me as I took my place on a comfortable ledge of rock, hollowed out so that I could lean back at ease, listen to the music, and let my fascinated gaze rest on the stretch of shining water below me.

A shadow fell suddenly across the turf at my feet. I looked up to see a tall, fine-looking lad, a few years older than myself, standing before me, hat in hand, as he held out the handkerchief I had dropped in moving away. Something strangely familiar struck me in the expression of his face, the blue eyes and short, wavy, fair hair, clear-cut features, mouth and chin resolute, although the smile was singularly winning, all were strangely like a manly older edition of my little Charlie; and as I took my handkerchief, murmuring some kind of thanks and excuse for my carelessness, I found it impossible not to show the curiosity and interest in the stranger that I felt. To my surprise he lingered after restoring my property and said in the most frankly good humored tone:

"I beg your pardon, but am I not speaking to Miss Helen Glenn, from America? I saw the name on your handkerchief."

CHAPTER XVIII.

GEOFFREY GERMAINE.

MY surprise may readily be imagined ! No sooner had I answered that he had guessed rightly, than he said, seating himself with no further ceremony, on the cliff near me :

" Then you must let me introduce myself. I am Charlie Germaine's cousin, Geoffrey Germaine. He has written and spoken to me about you; when I go over to the White House this afternoon I shouldn't find any welcome, I am afraid, Miss Helen, if I did not report having made myself known."

" Is it possible ! " I exclaimed, laughing and coloring together, " that you are the wonderful Geoff, who figures in so many of Charlie's stories ? " And then becoming conscious that my companion was almost what might be called " grown up "—certainly between eighteen and twenty years of age, I felt ashamed of my forwardness in speaking. But Mr. Geoffrey Germaine was by no means offended. He laughed and declared that he was very proud of Charlie's devotion, and added, with a sudden air of seriousness, that he felt like thanking me for what I had done to amuse him since his recent illness.

" There is nothing—nothing possibly to thank me for," I said hurriedly. " Charlie is the dearest little fellow in the world, and I am so happy when I can be of any comfort or service to him." I paused and, remembering some of Miss

Nettleship's dreary prognostications, I added anxiously, "Do you think, Mr. Germaine, that he will get very well ever?"

Geoffrey's face grew very thoughtful.

"There are about three chances out of ten in his favor, I believe," he said in a very sad tone of voice. "You know his mother and sister died of consumption, and it's supposed that Charlie has inherited the same complaint. But, as you doubtless know, Sir Henry has done every thing possible to ward off the danger in Charlie's case. He is his uncle's idol, and I dare not think what would happen to Sir Henry if he really were to be taken. However, we must hope for the best."

A brief silence ensued, during which I tried to remember just what was the connection beteen Geoffrey and Sir Henry Paulding, and, coming to no decision, I ventured to ask the question.

"Charlie is Sir Henry's nearest of kin," said Geoffrey, in his frank, downright manner, and looking at me out of the most honest pair of blue eyes I had ever seen, "and as Charlie's cousin, and distantly connected with Sir Henry himself, am I allowed to feel myself second in importance." He laughed lightly and, tossing a pebble out into the sea, continued, "I don't know what I should have done if this were not the case, as I'm like most of us Germaines, very much alone in the world. I can't imagine just how it happens that there are such a collection of the family in the picture gallery at Mallerdean, or we seem to have died off in this century with the most surprising alacrity."

I said as I glanced at his athletic young figure and fine face, tanned healthily and vigorous in every line, that he did not look much like an early death himself, whereupon he laughed again and answered that "worthless people were sure to be long-lived," but in a moment, his eyes resting on some distant object, he asked me if I had ever been to Mallerdean.

I shook my head.

"No," I answered, "but I am very curious and anxious to see it."

"Nothing easier," Geoffrey declared, and to my delight he added, "Would you like to go through it to-morrow? If I were not obliged to go over to Britton-Marsh I'd like nothing better than to take you out myself, but my card will answer the purpose, if you send it in to Mrs. Dewby, the housekeeper."

He fumbled in a side-pocket for his card-case, while I turned my gaze in the direction of the wooded park, I could see beyond what I knew to be the entrance gates to Mallerdean. The turrets and outline of a fine building were dimly discernible in the distance, and I wondered whether it were really true that the morrow should reveal in detail the glories of a place so familiar to me from Charlie's description! Mr. Germaine had been scribbling something on the back of his card and he now looked up to ask where I was staying? I explained, and with some conscious dignity, "with my friends the Bardistons," my idea of consideration for them making me think it would sound unkind to speak of myself only as their lodger. A queer little ex-

pression gleamed in Geoffrey's eyes and hovered about his lips, but he said as frankly as ever, "Oh, that's the Berlin wool shop, isn't it? My cousins, the Lesleys, lodge there."

I answered yes, but said nothing in regard to my mother's Russian journey, my association and visit with Miss Bayard, or indeed any of the particulars connected with my life in England, and I am certain that for all his polite and sincere interest in me Mr. Germaine's inborn prejudices were a little jarred to find that his cousin's favorite companion belonged to Mrs. Bardiston's class. But it served only to heighten my reluctance to speak of myself, and at the same time I could not help a slight feeling of amusement, knowing how my position at the White House was puzzling him, but Geoffrey hastened to break the silence by handing me the card, saying that he felt sure "it would be all right and Mrs. Dewby would show me every thing."

I rose now, saying I must try to find Sissy, and Geoffrey, anxious, it appeared, to be specially civil, lest I feel any embarrassment as a result of admitting to my inferior social station, begged to know whether I had any commissions or messages for Charlie, as he was to be "on time for dinner at Britton-Marsh."

"Only my best love," I said, smiling, as I held my hand out for good-by. "But perhaps you had better tell him how glad I was to meet you and that I am going to see Mallerdean."

He declared he would remember every word, shook my hand warmly, and bowed himself away. I returned to my bench near the pavilion, whence I observed young Mr. Ger-

maine joining the Miss Lesleys, and a party of fashionably dressed people. Some rapid conversation seemed to go on between them ; they glanced in my direction—I fancied I saw a look of supreme astonishment, if not contempt, on the Miss Lesleys' faces as the party moved away, but, in spite of a sense of mortification and annoyance of which I was ashamed, I could not regret this encounter, for now, as I told myself, when Charlie talked of Geoff the fine manly young face and the pleasant frank tones of his voice would come back, making Charlie's enthusiasm and admiration something with which, even in a lesser degree, I could share, and I determined on the morrow to search among the pictured Germaines at Mallerdean for the traits indicated in Geoffrey's spirited, if not actually handsome, young face. Perhaps he was destined to wear the uniform and do the deeds of valor for which my poor Charlie must, I feared, long in vain.

CHAPTER XIX.

PLEASANT EXPECTATIONS.

I WAS not long alone. Sissy soon appeared, her face radiant with expectation, for, as she promptly remarked, she had seen my visitor, recognized him as young Mr. Germaine, and now was in a state of great excitement over what I might have to tell. It was already nearly five o'clock ; the crowd had dispersed and the last strains of the afternoon music died away, so that we were quite ready to turn our faces homeward, especially as there was so much to talk about connected with the proposed visit to Mallerdean.

"Of course this will be simply perfection," exclaimed Sissy. "There are show-rooms to be seen every Thursday, but with young Mr. Germaine's card we shall see *every thing*. I declare, Helen, you were in luck when you met Master Charlie's cousin !"

I quite agreed with her, and yet I could not discuss the point quite as demonstratively as Sissy evidently would have liked, but I smiled my sympathy and response to her enthusiasm ; and, once up stairs in my own breezy little room, sitting in the window where I could see very plainly the turrets of Mallerdean Manor House, I took out Geoffrey's card and re-read what he had written upon it.

Stored away among many treasures of the past I have

that little card to-day, since by an odd chance it came again into my keeping; and how much does it not suggest of that long ago summer time and all that was so eventful in my life. I read as follows:

"Will Mrs. Dewby please show Miss Glenn and party all over Mallerdean? Miss Glenn is particularly anxious to see all the pictures.—G. K. G."

What an open *sesame* this bit of pasteboard would prove! How delightful to give Charlie details of my visit! So thinking, and humming an air gaily, I smoothed my hair, put on fresh collar and cuffs, and ran down to the shop parlor, where I found the little Goodwins assisting in laying the cloth for tea, which was served there, Sissy informed me, while she was toasting muffins and Cuthbert was busy reading out in the garden. I joined him and we talked over his lessons, and also the encounter I had so enjoyed with young Germaine, and to my delight Cuthbert could tell me a great deal about him.

"His father used to be Head Master at Britton-Marsh," Cuthbert explained, "and some of the oldest boys remember Mr. Geoffrey. He was a prime favorite, they say. One of the kind who always acted on the square, you know, and they never get done talking of a famous ball match he led five years ago. It is called "Fifteens," and there never was such a show, the fellows say."

"But he is at Oxford now," I said, feeling greatly interested.

"Oh yes; he took a scholarship, you know."

And poor Bertie sighed! If he could only attain next

year to this academical honor what pride and joy would it not bring to his heart! We chatted pleasantly enough on this congenial topic for another ten minutes, when Hilda came flying out to say tea was ready and to squeeze my hand closely in both her little palms while she whispered she meant to "hold me and *tie* me down so that I could not go away again."

Mrs. Bardiston, in her afternoon cap and second best black silk, presided over the tea-table with an air of exceeding affability and evident gratification in my seeing how very cosy and comfortable the household was in its new quarters, and when I had done full justice to every thing with the appetite of healthy youth, she yet pressed more upon me, insisting that I was not "my old self certainly or I would take this, that, and the other." But at last the table was cleared, and while Sissy and her mother were in the shop attending to a large party of customers from the Hotel, I gathered Cuthbert and the Goodwins about me and told stories in the twilight until little Hilda, sitting on my lap, let her head droop as she fell fast asleep on my shoulder. Muriel led the way and I carried her up to her little bed, and helped the older sister also to make ready for the night, as they did not remain up to the late supper, they told me; after which I returned to Cuthbert and insisted upon taking out the Latin books according to our old custom, while Sissy flitted back and forth, once darting up to answer Admiral Lesley's bell. She returned with a very amused expression dancing in her eyes.

"What do you suppose, Helen!" she exclaimed, sitting

down near us for an instant. "When Miss Lesley had given me her orders for to-morrow's breakfast—we do her marketing you know—she detained me to say in her lofty manner, "Your young friend appears to be *quite* a nice little person. May I ask if she is learning the business with you?"

"And what did you tell her, Sissy?" I demanded.

"Oh," answered Sissy, laughing, "I thought it would be great fun to mystify her, so I said as demurely as possible you couldn't say what you intended to do just yet."

"And then?" I remembered the look of cold disdain and annoyance cast upon me by Miss Lesley in the afternoon, and my cheeks burned.

"Well, I saw there was something else on her mind," said Sissy, "and I waited half a minute, when she said in a very majestic way, 'A young cousin of ours was speaking to her to-day, I believe; as she is an American she might possibly misunderstand his noticing her. It appears that she was very good-natured to Master Charlie Germaine when he fell from a carriage, and all that my cousin Geoffrey wished to do was to thank her for her civility.'"

"Why didn't you leave the room in silent contempt, Sis!" Cuthbert exclaimed angrily, while I sat speechless, feeling my cheeks tingle and an indignant sense of the slight offered, contending with an instinctive feeling that Geoffrey Germaine could not so have spoken of me. No! I recalled the frank look of his face, the honesty of the blue eyes fixed upon me, when he spoke of my "comforting" Charlie, and I refused to credit him with such small sentiments. As to Miss Lesley! what mattered it to mother or me what her

opinion might or might not be! I laughed while Sissy said quickly:

"I just wanted to hear her out for the fun of it! I knew how mad she would be when she discovers Helen is staying at Little Britton House. I lingered until she had finished speaking, and then said very politely, 'I will tell Miss Glenn what you say, Miss Lesley, but I do not think you need worry about her misunderstanding any thing. Her mother is always exceedingly particular about any acquaintance she makes.'"

And Sissy held her head up in the air and spoke with the tone I am sure she must have used to Miss Lesley, and which made both Cuthbert and me laugh heartily.

"I think on the whole I had the best of it," continued Sissy, with sparkling eyes. "I left her looking more perplexed and mystified than ever, and I don't doubt she is discussing what they probably call my 'impertinence' at this moment with Miss Ethel!"

"Well, never mind, Sissy," I declared with a light sigh. "I don't think they are worth bothering over, and you know it would never do for you to offend them. Come, didn't you say you were going to let me help you in your accounts?"

"Of course," said Sissy, springing up and going over to a little secretary in the corner whence she produced her "books."

"Oh, Helen! Isn't it delightful to balance books that don't come out all debit and no credit!"

We had gone over the old kind so often that there was

really a great satisfaction in the figures now to be summed up, and by Sissy's showing the shop was already more than "paying its way," while the little Goodwins, whose father was a captain out in India, were paying their regular thirty shillings a week for the two. "Quite a change," whispered Sissy, "for you know, or perhaps you didn't know, nothing had been paid for them in a twelvemonth."

And yet they had so long constituted what was referred to as "the school!" but hopeless as this made the old scheme of life appear, it yet placed the Bardistons in a more generous and kindly light than ever, and I could not help contrasting their forbearing charity toward the forlorn little girls with Miss Lesley's cold hauteur and dread of my "American" intrusiveness.

"You see their father has been wretchedly ill," continued Sissy, "and their mother died just before he returned to India, so we couldn't press for the money until lately, when we found they had a cousin doing very well in Exeter. Mother wrote and told him how the case stood, and now he sends the thirty shillings a week regularly. It covers all expenses, and mother says while that is done she will not send them away."

I gave Sissy's hand an affectionate squeeze to indicate my appreciation of her mother's kindness, but she hastily turned the subject to one which was engrossing to us both, our visit to Mallerdean the next day. Sissy had various bits of information connected with the place to give me. To begin with, the main part of the building was the oldest

in existence in this part of the country, and had in its day been famous for entertaining royalty.

"Mary Burge told me," said Sissy, with the usual sparkle in her eyes which came when any subject interested her, and made her face so bright to look upon, "that a room is shown where Queen Elizabeth and some of her gay court danced one night, and in another apartment—such a magnificent place Mary says—her bed is shown and the chair she sat in."

These were suggestions enough to fill my mind with delightful fancies, and long after I was in my bed in the summer darkness, which had a soft gleam of moonlight through it, I conjured up pictures of what I might hope to see on the morrow; captivating, poetic fancies they were, for, like many American girls, I had a romantic ideal of what an old English castle or manor house ought to be, and so far my experience had been sufficiently limited to make me all the more ardent in my desires to extend them. Where I lay in my comfortable little bed I could hear a faint sound of the water lapping the beach, and it soothed me gradually into the most delicious slumber.

CHAPTER XX.

MALLERDEAN.

A FLOOD of sunshine in my little room awakened me by six o'clock the next morning, and, remembering a promise to go out to the early market with Sissy, I made my toilet as quickly as possible, and ran down stairs to find her, duster in hand, arranging the shop, while Cuthbert, who had been taking down the shutters, was making ready to water the flower-beds, these being his special duties before an early breakfast and startling off to school.

"We're to have an errand boy next week," said Sissy, joining me in the shop-parlor where I helped her to lay the breakfast cloth, Susan coming in with a tray of dishes and regarding me with smiling approval: "You see so many of the county people or, perhaps I had better say, the gentry living near the town want their purchases sent to them and of course Bertie can't be expected to run errands here as he did in Britton-Marsh."

I quite agreed with her in this and feeling as though the sunshine and the sweet fragrances of the summer morning had gone to my head in some way, I ran out into the garden, which Bertie kept in excellent order, not attempting to rob it of its pretty, old-fashioned look, only seeing that the beds were well weeded and the blossoms cared for, while under the wide branches of an old apple-tree he had

contrived a very nice rustic seat and a small table, upon which his books were now resting. I picked one up, turning the pages over idly, and at the same moment a letter in a thick white envelope with a crest upon it fell to the ground.

Cuthbert started and his face flushed.

"I declare, Helen," he exclaimed, "I forgot all about that letter! A footman from Mallerdean brought it last night. It was for Admiral Lesley, he said, from Sir Henry Paulding. Nell, I hope it is nothing very important."

We both hurried in to Sissy with the neglected letter, Bertie hastening to add that the man said Sir Henry had come down from London unexpectedly, but would leave Mallerdean to-day.

"Dear, me Bertie," said Sissy, very much distressed, "that was sadly forgetful of you, but your head is always away up in the clouds lately."

She flew away up stairs to deposit the letter on the admiral's table in the drawing-room, where he would find it on coming out to his breakfast, while I stood still in the window of the little parlor lost in thought, wondering whether Sir Henry's being at Mallerdean ought to influence our visit there. Directly Sissy returned, I asked her opinion.

"That won't make any difference," she said briskly, "it's a show place anyway, and of course even if Sir Henry were there, we would not see him. But why not, after all," she added suddenly, and looking at me with new interest. "Surely after your kindness to Charlie Germaine—"

I interrupted her quickly, coloring at the thought of intruding upon Charlie's uncle for such a reason.

"Oh, no—no Sissy, dear," I said hurriedly, "not for any thing. I want to see Mallerdean and the pictures, and all that, but I hope Sir Henry won't even find out I have been there."

But Sissy's expression might have shown me that she had no idea of allowing me to miss an "opportunity" if one arose.

I was ready that day to enjoy every thing, and when, breakfast over, Sissy and I set forth for our marketing it seemed to me as though no occupation could have been more entertaining. We went up into a hilly portion of the town where the shops and buildings were quainter in design than those nearer the sea, and what delighted me was the fact that every shopkeeper had his or her counter gay with the wild flowers which abound in such lavish profusion from March until November in South Devonshire. To purchase our eggs and butter from baskets placed on a stand richly colored with sweet peas, the yellow green of "Lady's Mantle," or the white-flowered dryas and guelder rose, seemed to suggest that they could not but be the very best of country produce, while even the grocer in handing Sissy her package of tea and sugar offered a bouquet of pale pink pimpernels, and some of the deep scarlet, calling her attention to the fact that the day was going to be fine, since the brilliant blossoms lay open, instead of closing, as they always do when clouds are gathering and rain is imminent.

"Isn't it delightful to pay as you go?" said Sissy, when, our last purchase made, we were descending the slope to the Berlin Wool Bazar once more. "I declare the satisfaction it gives one is more than all the poetry in the world, but I have not altogether abandoned my romantic dreams for you," she added, laughing and regarding my beaming face with an amused expression on her own. I answered, laughing with her, that I was a poor subject to romance about and yet—yet, in my very heart of hearts, was there not some such vague idea as influenced Sissy in her day-dreams for me? Had I not some faint, intangible fancy that perhaps a bit of romance lay in that past—that English life about which my mother was so strangely silent? However, conjecturing would do no good, and at all events I was certainly too happy to admit of any thing like regret, even should what was mysterious in my mother's past never find solution.

I took my work into the shop for the rest of the morning, amused and interested by observing Sissy's customers, and occasionally helping her, rising at once to do so when Miss Ethel Lesley appeared, to buy some more blue wool and favor me with another critical stare, which only made me the more business-like in manner, and I nearly upset Sissy's gravity by saying, with a decidedly nasal intonation,

"Have we any more of the light-blue wool, Miss Bardiston?" and, observing that Miss Ethel was all attention, I indulged in one or two rather decided Yankeeisms, such as I had certainly never heard among our own class at home!

"Oh, Helen!" exclaimed Sissy, as soon as our customer had departed, "how could you! I verily believe she will feel it her duty to warn Sir Henry against you, as not a fit companion for little Charlie!"

"All right," I answered gayly, "I'm willing to abide by Charlie's decision."

The morning passed rapidly enough, and, dinner over, about three o'clock we set forth, Sissy, Cuthbert, and I, for Mallerdean Manor House.

Our road lay through a delicious country and the walk seemed scarcely long enough. We took one of the hilly pathways which were skirted by hedges almost as verdant as if the season were not advanced nearly to the winter. The town below looked gay and animated as in the morning, for the sunshine was as brilliant as at mid-day, and yet there was an exhilaration in the atmosphere, and the fresh breezes from the sea which gave a color to our cheeks and lent something, it seemed to me, light-hearted and happy to our steps. Sissy had already roamed about the park of Mallerdean several times, and so knew her way to the entrance gates by a short cut. The lodge-keeper opened them very good-humoredly, and on seeing Mr. Germaine's card was all civility and courtesy, explaining that we had better go to the side entrance of the house and ask for Mrs. Dewby, the housekeeper, at once.

The finely proportioned line of buildings, antique and sumptuous in design, delighted me as they met our view. The house stood upon a slight eminence, terraces flagged with marble and ornamented with huge vases, on one of

which in the November sunlight a gorgeous peacock was sunning himself, faced the main entrance, and from these a flight of marble steps led down to the first of the flower gardens, while beyond this the lawn was richly dotted with cedar, oak and chestnut trees. It seemed almost impossible that the great manor should be maintained for one family only, of whom the important member was a little child, so many were its windows, so vast the extent of the whole building ; but I understood later better than I did then how much of traditionary importance attached itself to such a place, especially when it had been, as had Mallerdean Manor, for generations in the same family.

The side entrance to which the gate-keeper had directed us was part of a very pretty wing of the old house. An answer to our summons came promptly, and we found ourselves in a square hallway, well lighted and home-like, the footman who admitted us taking the card away and returning in a few moments to ask my name.

I felt somewhat fluttered as I wrote my name on the back of the card, and, at Sissy's suggestion, added Mrs. Bardiston's address below, Sissy standing the while silent but with the utmost complacence in her manner.

We were ushered into a small room at one side of this hall, a little book room or study it might have been, very bright and cheerful, although not particularly newly furnished. Some fishing paraphernalia was carelessly laid on one table and Sissy whispered to me that they probably belonged to young Mr. Germaine.

"For you know," she said, in an impressive whisper, "he

is tremendously fond of out-door sports. Sir Henry, I suppose, may make him his heir if poor little Charlie shouldn't live."

I felt a pang at my heart with the mere suggestion, but there was no time for further speculation. The rustle of stiff drapery in the hall, a little cough or "ahem" announced Mrs. Dewby's approach, and the housekeeper appeared; an imposing-looking old lady who, as Sissy described it afterwards, was "very affable."

It may be that what happened later makes the first impressions I received of Mallerdean as vivid as though painted on my mind in imperishable colors, yet I recall the sense of almost bewildered admiration with which I found myself following Mrs. Derby down a corridor through a heavy oaken door, and into the main hall, which in medieval days had been a banquet chamber, and which, lighted by stained glass windows, gorgeous in proportion and rich tapestried hangings, might at the present day, I fancied, have served its original purpose equally well. Above a huge fire-place, with chimney-piece of heavily carved black oak, was the portrait of the first Charles Germaine, a noble-looking gentleman of the court of James I., and I fancied that it was easy to trace in the fair hair, blue eyes, and frank young countenance some resemblance to Geoff Germaine, while Sissy. was captivated with the splendor of the costume this ancestor of my poor Charlie's wore, and declared she could quite imagine him pacing up and down this grand old hall, or perhaps mounting the fine staircase at its lower end. On either side

doorways led into the "state drawing-room," library, and its ante-chamber, all of which Mrs. Dewby displayed with a pardonable sort of pride, for they were certainly magnificent apartments, while the dining-room, with its lofty ceiling, old portraits, and side-board glittering with silver and glass, its windows opening from two sides on to the lawn, which was smooth as velvet and dotted with fine cedar trees, was the room Sissy had mentioned wherein four centuries ago Queen Elizabeth had trod a stately measure. Above, on ascending the grand staircase, Mrs. Dewby showed us the richly hung though rather solemn bedchamber in which her majesty had slept, and beyond this a suite of charming rooms including a boudoir which was like some old-fashioned picture. Every thing dainty and soft in color if a trifle faded, the windows hung with lace and pale yellow silk, the chairs, tables, writing-desk, and piano all of satin-wood, while the trifles, a variety of elegant ornaments and knic-knacs, were in the best taste and of the richest quality. I was interested enough to hear that these had been the rooms once occupied by Charlie's sister. Across the hall and up and down various corridors, a dozen rooms were shown us, all richly furnished, but with the pathetic silence of a lonely household about them; but the views from every window were enchanting, now taking in the old-fashioned, luxurious flower gardens, again some vista of the deeply wooded park, or it might be the meadow lands or the fertile cliff-bound country beyond which the blue waters of the bay were clearly to be seen. Silent, secluded as was ever castle in fairy lore, Mallerdean seemed to me like some enchanted bit

of fairy land, instinct with all that was beautiful in life and nature, only needing the awakening touch of some happy hand to awaken it into its fullest possibility! The long picture gallery in a wing of the newer building was a place where I would gladly have spent hours. Here were the various Germaines, the soldierly "Charlies," whom my little friend burned to emulate, and such a goodly collection of "fair women and brave men," Germaines, Pauldings, Dowlings, and even Lesleys, according to Mrs. Dewby's account that I felt as though I were in some fine court company, while Sissy called my attention to the fact that my own somewhat peculiar type, the reddish brown hair, gray eyes, black brows, and lashes, which I have before itemized to my reader, was certainly repeated among the Dowlings pictured here, which no doubt accounted for Miss Lesley's interest in my personal appearance.

But Charlie's living rooms when he was here—where were they? I felt so afraid of seeming to intrude upon Sir Henry that even to Mrs. Dewby I hesitated to ask a question which would seem to bring my friendship at the White House into prominence. So it was very satisfactory when, after studying the picture gallery, the housekeeper said, "Perhaps you would like to see young Master Charles' room, Miss," and I, well enough pleased, followed the old lady down a side corridor, Sissy lingering a moment longer among the painted presences—the gay looking court beauties whose smiling eyes and lips seemed to challenge our admiration and forbid our reflecting that they were long since "dust to dust."

Mrs. Dewby opened a doorway which led into a small suite of rooms. Yes, I recognized at once the objects Charlie had lovingly described. The first was a sort of school-room, lined on one side with book-shelves, comfortably cozy and homelike, with windows opening to the park, to glades which, cool and deep, softened all the vista, yet made the view on this June day rich and peaceful. Next came a little bedroom; then what must have been his play-room, well stocked, and very bright and cheerful.

I was standing within it holding a little toy gun sadly in my hands, wondering when and how the high ambitions of the little life so dear to me would end, and it seemed impossible for an instant to check the tears that rose to my eyes. They blotted out all else for a moment. When the mist had been forced away and I trusted myself to lift my face, I saw that some one was standing in the adjoining room talking to Mrs. Dewby.

The figure of a tall gentleman was somewhat in shadow, and yet I felt a queer spasm of familiarity with something about it as I looked—and wondered. Mrs. Dewby was making some sort of explanation, I think, in regard to our presence there. I heard an unfamiliar voice—deep-toned and kindly; then her answer, "Certainly, Sir Henry," and the footsteps of the master of Mallerdean came nearer. I raised my eyes with a cry of dismay. For, feeling as if something in the region of my heart was stifling me, I found myself face to face with my mother's enemy,—no other than Sir Henry Paulding!

CHAPTER XXI.

SIR HENRY PAULDING.

I HARDLY know how to describe the next few moments! There he stood—Charlie's beloved uncle—the hero of his stories, the *preux chevalier* whom my little friend compared joyously to those Germaines of soldierly renown, and yet—could it be possible? Could he be the same person upon whom my mother had turned that cruel look of scorn? of whom she, gentlest of women, had spoken as her enemy?

I stood still for an instant, feeling as if the objects in the cheerful little rooms, the stretches of verdant park and blue sky and sunlight without, were all rushing in a confusion of form and color before me. Meanwhile Sir Henry Paulding bowed somewhat stiffly, turned to say something to Mrs. Dewby, and walked away.

Knowing nothing of my strange associations with her master Mrs. Dewby suspected nothing. If she observed my agitation she paid no attention to it, perhaps fancying that I was overawed by this sudden encounter with her master—an august personage, no doubt, in her eyes—and I was glad that Sissy's keen glance and not over-delicate discrimination were not at hand.

How I rejoined her, how I explained that I did not feel well, that I wanted to hurry home, I can scarcely tell. It seemed to me that I did not breathe freely until we were once more out upon the high road toward the town ; and there I had to stop and gasp nervously—for the park gates opened soon after we left them, a carriage whirled by, and I just caught a glimpse Sir Henry's fine, pale countenance within it.

"Then he is going," I exclaimed involuntarily.

"He ! who ?" cried Sissy.

"Didn't you see Sir Henry in the carriage ?" said Cuthbert. "I suppose he's off for the White House. Dear me ! isn't that young Germaine lucky ?"

What was being said seemed to reach me in a kind of dream, to be recalled as having a meaning later, while the objects in the gay little town which we soon entered, the brilliancy of the setting sun, which always seemed to make the windows of the houses dotted along the beach road flash like jewels, even the music of the parade band which reached us softly from a distance, affected me oddly as though what was familiar in them all had suddenly grown strange ; and it was perhaps fortunate that I could truthfully say to Sissy I felt weak and sick, for without some such excuse my manner and my pale face must have betrayed the fact that something unusual had happened. Both she and Cuthbert were all kindness and consideration and would have done any thing or every thing for me on our reaching home, but I declared, and with perfect sincerity, that all I desired or needed was to lie down for a time by

myself in my own room, and I made my escape up stairs, promising to come down to tea in half an hour.

Once by myself, the need of keeping up being over, I flung myself upon my knees before my little bed and sobbed as though my heart would break. Utterly bewildered as I was, I could realize but one fact—that an end had come to all my happy times with Charlie; that he would have to know something of the cause—that we would be compelled to say good-by, and my little friend and I would drift away from each other's lives. What would mother say when I wrote her? And why had she failed to recognize Sir Henry's name?

I think I contrived to mingle some prayers for guidance in this unhappy business, with my tears, and at last I forced myself to dry my eyes, and laying aside my hat and jacket, I bathed my flushed face and sat down in the window to compose myself before going down to the Bardistons' tea table. But the distant turrets, the tall trees, and richly verdant slopes of Mallerdean riveted my gaze. Yet, oh, with what a different point of view I now regarded them! Only yesterday the sight of Charlie's home, bathed in the rays of the setting sun, its windows gleaming and its woodland vibrating with the evening glory cast about it, would have seemed to me the fairest picture my eyes had ever rested upon; but now, alas, the grandeur of the old manor, the fairness of its park and gardens, seemed only added bitterness, for did it not all emphasize the fact that within those gates, within that doorway, lived the one person whom I had ever heard my mother speak of with contempt! Yes,

it must be that I had seen the last of Mallerdean from within, for had she not called him "her enemy!"

Tears began to rise again dangerously, and I started up to go down stairs, a chill of weariness, of annoyance at all this depressing mystery, making me, I fear, look very wretched as I entered the best parlor, where Mrs. Bardiston had a cozy tea spread, hot muffins and cakes giving fragrant odors and promise of dainty morsels to the hungry members of the party; but I could only try to eat in silence, smiling feebly now and then at what the others were saying.

Sissy had plunged into an account of the glories of Mallerdean, the "affability" of Mrs. Dewby, etc., etc., and did not at first hear a quick double knock on the front door; but Hilda Goodwin had spied a carriage standing without, and Sissy's narrative came quickly to a stand-still. We heard Susan's tread going to the door; some one was admitted, who went up stairs, and in a moment she appeared coming through the kitchen, saying, "Sir Henry Paulding, ma'am—gone up-stairs to see the Admiral."

I felt the color flaming to my cheeks and bent my face down over my plate, but the rest of the party were so interested in the mere fact of Sir Henry's being in the house that my agitation passed unheeded, and for the next five minutes I heard nothing that was said around me. I sat there only conscious of every step or sound in the rooms above. Suddenly the Admiral's bell was rung. Mrs. Bardiston called somewhat sharply to Susan, who answered quickly. She departed—I almost counted her steps going up—waited breathlessly as in a moment they came down, and

she appeared at the parlor door, with a broad smile in my direction saying,

"If you please, Miss Glenn, Sir Henry's compliments, and he would be obliged if you would step up a moment to the drawing-room."

I started to my feet, not knowing for an instant what I ought to do or say ; but Sissy seemed ready almost to push me from the room. I heard Mrs. Bardiston exclaim,

"Well dear me ! what a strange thing. Sissy, see that Miss Helen's sash is straight."

Then somehow, like a person in a dream, I found myself slowly mounting the stairs to the drawing-room.

The door stood ajar. As I hesitated, a voice, very kind in tone, said, "Come in," and I entered.

Sir Henry was standing near the chimney-piece gazing down thoughtfully into the fire. Much to my relief I saw at once that he was alone.

CHAPTER XXII.

A REVELATION.

MY heart was beating furiously as I advanced into the room, wondering what would happen next; and although I felt sure that he must very cruel and unprincipled, or hard-hearted, or something dreadful to make mother regard him in such a light, it was a relief when he spoke, and I had to admit that his voice was gentle and kind.

"I decided to see you here, my dear," Sir Henry was saying, "because I felt that you might talk to me more freely than you could at Mallerdean. To begin with, I want to thank you for your kindness to my poor boy."

He paused and held out his hand.

"Helen, you can not tell how much you have done for him—for that poor little fading life!"

His manner was so entirely different from what I had expected—so frank in its kindness—that I hardly knew how to show him that I knew he was mother's enemy, and without reflection I put my cold little fingers into his and murmured something rather polite, considering my sense of injured dignity.

"You don't seem to know me, Helen," he continued,

looking at me very earnestly. "Can it be possible that you have no idea who I am?"

His eyes, piercing in spite of their friendliness, seemed to be commanding me to say all or whatever I knew concerning him. I was trembling with nervousness, and yet dared not disobey this quiet, commanding-looking man whom I wished—Oh how I wished!—I could call our friend. The events of the day made it hard for me to keep the tears back as I answered, scarcely lifting my eyes:

"You are—our enemy, I suppose."

A strange expression crossed Sir Henry Paulding's face. I would have called it amusement had there not been something so intensely mournful back of the smile which just rested on his lips for an instant.

"Poor child!" he said, softly, as though to himself. He paused a moment and then added aloud:

"Helen, I do not wish to be your enemy—or hers—I never was. But once I could not act as she thought just and right. But do you know the story?"

I shook my head and could say nothing, but looked at him with a dilated, half-terrified glance.

"You have heard nothing of it?" he exclaimed in evident astonishment. "Has your mother never talked to you of her young days?"

"Very little; I know nothing but a few stories about her childhood."

He moved from the chimney-piece and walked rapidly toward the window, where, for an instant, he stood looking out, his hands tightly clasped at his back, while I was silent

from something like a dread of what might come next. He turned, facing me suddenly.

"Do you mean to say," he asked, "that you were not aware of the fact that — I am your uncle as well as Charlie's?"

The room seemed to be reeling around me, but I tried to draw nearer to him as I spoke.

"What!" I contrived to say, "her brother! and yet— Oh, Sir Henry—she—I—"

What could I do or say! It seemed such a cruel case, and yet my mother *must* be right—she always had been—always was.

When Sir Henry spoke again it was in a tone quiet and compassionate.

"I supposed," he said, looking at me with great kindness in his glance, "when I first heard of your being with Charlie that you knew of your relationship to him, but for some reason of your mother's did not mention it. I am her step-brother. Since she left England, I inherited my present title, and had to take the name of Paulding with it, very unexpectedly, and through a series of deaths of which she has evidently never heard."

I made a little quick motion and Sir Henry continued, with a sad sort of smile:

"You are very fond of romances, I judge, Helen, from the stories Charlie has told me, but you must not imagine there are any connected with my change of name, or even my estrangement from your mother."

He turned back, gazing into the very depths of the fire

and leaning his head on his hand. I was only a child in years, but I felt my heart ache as I watched Sir Henry's careworn face half averted, yet showing plainly lines of what seemed to me to mean loneliness of life—of very heart itself. He raised his face and continued :

"Bitter facts—sad, hard truths—cost us our friendship, for we were friends as well as brother and sister. There seem to me, however, strong reasons now why you should hear the story—something may have to be settled in regard to your future, and I wish you to know," he smiled, "the very worst of your uncle."

I was compelled to say over and again to myself that he must be very unkind in reality ; for his manner was so gentle, and his face looked so full of a certain high nobility as he spoke, that it was impossible to believe him deliberately cruel. I thought of the Cavalier Germaine, whose portrait hung in the western end of the gallery at Mallerdean. Something in the two faces expressed the same fine purpose, the same sort of honest loyalty which I had believed Charlie's uncle possessed, yet which I could not, must not associate with one whom my mother despised.

Sir Henry continued :

" The Lesleys, who are related to your mother through the Dowlings (when you hear the story, you will understand the double connection in our family), know only that you are my niece, and are a guest of Miss Bayard's. I do not think they are aware of all the peculiar circumstances of your mother's last year in England and her departure from home, so that when you meet them you need not feel

any special constraint. It is better to tell the people of the house what you have discovered, since your mother left you in a certain sense in their care, and when you go back to Britton-Marsh tell Miss Bayard from me that I desire her earnestly to tell you the whole story. Say to her to express whatever her opinion of me may have been or is."

I raised my eyes now eagerly enough.

"Miss Bayard says," I began—and broke off, coloring, lest Miss Bayard would not like her opinion quoted.

Sir Henry smiled.

"Never mind, my dear," he said, with decided good-humor, if not amusement, in his tone, "we will not mind what Miss Bayard says or thinks. Only tell her that I am willing to trust my good name, so far as my strange little niece is concerned, in her hands. I am obliged to go to London to-night, but will be back at the White House very soon. Meanwhile, Helen, write to your mother all that has occurred. I have explained the matter satisfactorily to the Lesleys, who remember your mother very well."

I felt a sudden sense of resentment at the idea that mother's affairs were so completely taken out of her own hands, as it were, and when Sir Henry made a movement as though he would have kissed me good-by, I involuntarily shrank from the salutation, and he turned away, while, in some fashion intended to be polite, I said good-by, managed to escape from the room and reached the little parlor, where, as may well be imagined, I found the Bardistons in a state of extreme impatience and suppressed excitement.

CHAPTER XXIII.

I SURPRISE THE BARDISTONS.

THE effect of my startling piece of news was to cause Mrs. Bardiston to drop into the nearest chair and Sissy to give a little scream which, with a sudden look at the ceiling, she suppressed. Cuthbert was the only one of the party who took it philosophically.

"I always thought something would come of all this," he remarked, and Mrs. Bardiston and Sissy turned their eyes immediately upon him as though he had been keeping back a piece of intelligence from all of us.

"Your uncle, is he?" said Sissy, and in an instant she added with a little mournful reflection, "Oh, Helen, then that is the end of every thing."

For with the traditions of her people and her class Sissy realized the gulf socially that might be made to exist between Mallerdean and the family at Victoria Lodge, as the Bardistons had called their present home.

I laughed.

"I don't believe it will end any thing at all," I answered. "And even if my mother were to so much as visit Mallerdean itself, would not that bring me nearer to you, Sissy?"

But Sissy shook her head.

"No, my dear," she said, very sagely. "It is not to be

thought of for an instant, and of course we'd have to accept the position."

I verily believe the romantic side of it appealed to her so strongly that she was quite willing to "accept" whatever would be involved. My possibilities in the future were decidedly interesting to her, and it was amusing to see how quickly she began to plan for all that might, would, could or should happen in the event of Sir Henry's inviting my mother and me to stay with him at the old manor house whose glories we had so lately discussed.

"But how did it happen," inquired Mrs. Bardiston, "that you never heard of this from your mother?"

I explained briefly that there had been some family trouble, but added that I did not know the details of the story myself; and Sissy remarked solemnly that "there always were those difficulties in the families of the great," and Mrs. Bardiston was reminded of something which had occurred when she and her sister Maria were girls at Bath, and with a tone of great importance she related a story melodramatic in its details and in which a long-lost heir was discovered in the son of a pot-boy in the George Inn, etc.; but I am afraid that we young people were not particularly attentive listeners, for Sissy and I had a great deal we longed to say to each other on this exciting topic, and when the shop-bell rang, and Mrs. Bardiston darted out to attend to her customer, we plunged at once into a talk such as only girls of our age and enthusiastic temperament could carry on. But an excited little whisper, "There he goes!" from Cuthbert in the window, brought us to his side, and we

watched Sir Henry's departure in the fine carriage, after which Mrs. Bardiston, who had returned and appeared to feel that something unusual might be expected on such an occasion, inquired what we would prefer for supper.

"I think we might have chops as well as a bit of fish," she said, entering into these domestic details so heartily that it was hard to believe that she was the same elegant "fine lady," who had appeared to rule Albert Villa indifferent to every thing in the kitchen department. Sissy was about asking me whether I would like to accompany her to the market close by for these delicacies, which were a tribute to my "greatness," when she hesitated, remembering, no doubt, that I was now to be regarded as Sir Henry Paulding's niece! So I laughingly took the matter out of her hands, put my things on, and we were soon out in the foggy twilight speeding up a narrow little street where various tempting litttle delicacies were to be had. I certainly felt no sense of superiority over Sissy since the afternoon, and yet I could not help wondering whether I would ever have any thing to do with Mallerdean—the historic old house whose long corridors, stained glass and fascinating galleries seemed now to haunt me with something stronger in their personality. Had my mother ever been there—would she ever come again—would Charlie and I—possibly the delightful Geoff—ever spend summer days in the cool, sweet depths of that park? I wondered, and my heart beat perhaps a trifle faster as Sissy and I did our shopping; but it was only the picturesque side of it all, I am sure, which appealed to me, although, as Sissy confessed later, she already

pictured me in "satins and laces sweeping up and down the grand staircase," which we had mounted like a pair of shy mice earlier in the day !

We went back down the hilly little street, Sissy doing justice to her novel-reading by the way in which she spoke of me as the possible "Mistress of Mallerdean ;" but so romantic were her suggestions that I declared I would take the little market-basket out of her hands if she went on, as she would certainly upset its contents !

"Oh Helen," said Sissy, with much disappointment in tone and manner, "I do believe you will always be just practical. But that may turn out better for me in the end," she added. "For when you are at Mallerdean in years to come perhaps you won't look down upon me."

We certainly had a very cozy little supper party, Mrs. Bardiston treating me with unlimited respect, and when about nine o'clock word from Miss Lesley came down to inquire whether Miss Glenn could see them in the morning before her departure, the final touch was given to my hostess's satisfaction.

But long after Sissy, whose head had been so full of grand possibilities, was asleep, I lay awake in the cot placed for me in her room, thinking and thinking of the deeper meanings in all Sir Henry had had to say ; thinking of the estrangement which certainly had embittered some hours of his life and had separated my mother from her kinsfork. And what would Miss Bayard's story be, I wondered ?

Just outside of my little window I could see a glimmer of the ocean and the rock-bound shore beyond, which, in

daylight, I knew the towers of Mallerdean were visible, and above which the summer sky was throbbing with starlight that looked friendly, and encouraging me to gentle thoughts of the place and people with whom my mother's early life must have been associated. But it was hard to wait for the morning and my return to Britton-Marsh.

I slept soundly. Youth has at least this panacea for all excitement, and in the morning I had to force myself into a belief that the events of the previous day were facts, not visions in dreamland ; but on going down to the shop parlor for breakfast I had every proof in the reality of what had taken place, in the deferential manner with which Mrs. Bardiston, Sissy, and Susan treated me, Cuthbert alone maintaining his previous air of *bon camarderie*, while the little Goodwins seemed only impressed by the fact that something very delightful and agreeably exciting had taken place.

The best parlor was given up to me, there to await my call from the Lesleys ; but before quitting the room Sissy indulged in a great deal of fun over the change she was sure I would find in the young ladies' manner towards me, and begged that I would be "as airish as possible."

But to tell the truth I was in too agitated a frame of mind over the thought of what Miss Bayard might have to tell me to feel much interest in any such question, and when Susan opened the door to announce "Admiral and the Miss Lesleys," and the family party were ushered in, I was conscious of no special embarrassment, but only decided stupidity. Sissy, however, would have been

delighted had she been present. Sir Henry, who was only their second cousin, must have spoken in warm terms of me, for both the Miss Lesleys advanced with a smiling, if not with actually an effusive manner, and kissed me affectionately while they presented me to their father, a stout, red-faced little gentleman with a gruff but not unkindly manner.

"What did you mean, by not introducing yourself to us yesterday?" Miss Lesley said, when we were all seated; "of course I see now that you are a real Dowling."

I laughed and answered that I never heard the name until I came to England; and I could not resist a temptation to shock my visitors by saying,

"Mother always seemed more interested in her American associations."

"Dear me, you don't say so," said Miss Ethel, scrutinizing me closely, "How very odd!" While Miss Lesley murmured, "Only fancy," and the Admiral asked for my mother, much as though they had parted a week before and then giving his stick a little thump on the parlor floor exclaimed,

"God bless my soul! how much she is like her uncle."

And when his daughters glanced at him in surprise, the old gentleman continued:

"I am not talking of Henry; I mean Allan."

And there rose suddenly to my mind a vision of that bit of gorse-covered down in Surrey, upon which I had gazed with my mother—how long ago it seemed—and where she and "Allan" had gone out holiday-making, in the time which

she appeared to have been trying to blot out from her remembrance.

The Lesleys plied me with questions which I answered in as non-committal a fashion as possible, but I am sure they intended to be friendly and polite, although it certainly seemed to me as though Ethel had the bump of inquisitiveness developed to an extraordinary degree ; but the visit was ended at last ; when the good-byes were exchanged, I was assured that my new cousins would call upon me at Little-Britton House, and also that they expected to meet me at Mallerdean. But I fear that they must have parted from me with the impression that I was a very dull and undemonstrative girl, for how could they know that I was absorbed in the one idea of getting back to Britton-Marsh, and Miss Bayard ? Cuthbert, on his way to school earlier in the day, had left a note for me, announcing my intention to return at once, and when, after an exciting farewell to the Bardistons, I found myself about mid-day at the Britton-Marsh station, I was delighted that Miss Bayard herself had come to meet me.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A STRANGE HISTORY.

MISS BAYARD, I am sure, guessed in an instant from my face that something important had happened; but, singular to say, when, seated at her side in the carriage, my hand tightly clasped in hers, I tried to tell my story, she did not seem at all surprised.

"I thought it would come about sooner or later," she said to me very gently; "and to tell you the truth, Helen, I believed that good would result from it, and so encouraged your friendship with Charlie Germaine; but—yes," she turned her gaze from mine absently for a moment. "Yes, he is right, the story must be told to you. I will take the responsibility of it upon myself, for I am sure were your mother here it is what she would wish."

No more was said until we reached Little Britton House, when I flew to tell Martha my surprising discovery—and realized that she had been in whatever little plot there was to make me known to my mother's relatives.

"When did you know it, Martha?" I exclaimed, sitting in the window of her pleasant room, whence I could see the White House, with its many windows, beyond the lawn and oak trees across the road. A mist had risen, and rain

looked imminent, but as yet the outline of dear Charlie's home was not obscured.

"Why, as soon as the accident happened," said Martha, "but Miss Bayard said at once that we were not to speak of it, but we both agreed that something good would come of this association; and indeed, my dear, many a day when I've watched you going over there to keep the poor little lad company, I've waited impatiently enough for your return, with news that you'd met your uncle."

I was thankful that the day was rainy, and what Britton-Marsh people would call cloudy and disagreeable, for there would be less danger that, in our long talk after dinner, Miss Bayard would be interrupted by callers. She looked pale and weary, and I was glad that she settled herself comfortably upon her sofa, while I seated myself on an ottoman by her side in the garden window, much as I had sat by dear old Miss Vail, when I heard the first bit of Miss Bayard's own history. She held a packet of old letters and some photographs in her hand, which, when the time came, she showed me, but, before beginning the story, said very impressively,

"Remember, Helen, that I want you to judge of all this, bearing in mind that your mother believes herself to be strongly in the right, and that it is on this conviction only that she has taken her present course."

"I know that, dear Miss Bayard," I answered, "but why did I not understand? Why did you not tell me he was our enemy?"

"My dear," she said quickly, "it was so much better to

let the event take its natural course—nay, let me rather say, to leave Providence to work out His will. Of course I appreciate your mother's feelings, and at one time no one shared them so strongly as myself. But, Helen, as we grow older, as our world narrows, we not only become more lenient in our judgments, but I think more just. The fires of youth burn so strong that they are apt, if we feed them, to leave us nothing but ashes. I am not sure now even how much your mother's prejudice is the result of her accustoming herself to believe hardly of Sir Henry. But you shall hear the story; and, as you know nothing of your mother's English life, I will begin pretty far back with my own first recollection of the Merrivale family. Your grandfather was Squire Marsh, a fine specimen of the old-fashioned country gentleman, but who lived in an improvident, free-handed, careless way, like many of his class, in the house where he and his father before him had been born and brought up. The place was called "Merrivale," and was near a small village some five miles beyond Hilford. The Marshes were old friends of ours; and it was when I was quite a little girl that my cousin, a widow lady, took me for the first time to visit your mother. How well I remember her! The prettiest, sweetest, merriest little creature, absolutely devoted to her one brother Allan. We three spent a long, delightful summer day laying the foundation of a friendship which, I fancied, time nor change would ever influence, and I returned to my own home delighted with the Merrivales, and only anxious for a new occasion to renew my intercourse with them. The friend-

ship prospered. Your grandfather came frequently to our house, and often brought his little daughter with him, while during the school-holidays, Allan sometimes accompanied them, and in return I spent some of the happiest hours of my life at the Squire's place. It seems to me, even with all my present experience, that Allan Marsh was the most charming boy in many ways I have ever known, and, unlike most very handsome petted young fellows who are accustomed to see the world at their feet, he was curiously unselfish, while his devotion to your mother had in it the tenderness of a woman and the chivalry of a man. And, Helen, it was fortunate that this was the case, for otherwise I fear your mother, as she grew into girlhood, would not have been happy in her home. She was warm-hearted, impulsive, and ardent in temperament. There had been no gentle guiding hand, no mother's influence, since she could remember, to help the young nature to bear with the harsh discipline put on it, and I am sure that but for her brother Allan she would often have been very miserable. Her father was good-humored and easy-going, ready enough with kind words and promises, but he thought little of his children's comfort or real well being, and they grew up not only knowing nothing of the ease and luxury which he contrived to get for himself, but with no sort of training with which to face the world. Allan was taught nothing useful ; your mother was offered none of the solid comforts of home life, which make of the young girl a happy and contented woman, so that you can fancy how the pair clung to each other in a household gradually becoming more and more

comfortless in spite of its master's extravagance, and wherein there was little or no thought of the young lives and natures developing day by day, growing into man's and woman's estate.

"It was, I think, about this time that the Squire's visits to my cousin became more frequent, and one winter's day, which I remember very distinctly, on going to her house I found my cousin Henry—your uncle—in the library, looking, as I saw at once, singularly unhappy. He was older than either of the young Marshes with whom his family were connected—at this time, I believe, about four-and-twenty, and was regarded by all the kith and kin as a remarkably fine, high-spirited, and promising young man. But he was the last person to accept with equanimity the fact that his mother had just consented to marry Squire Marsh.

"'Of course, I suppose,' he said to me that day when I tried to congratulate him on what, in my eyes, seemed a delightful connection, 'I have no right to interfere with whatever she sees fit to do, but I have my sister's interest to consider, and I have been doing my best to induce my mother to settle a certain sum of money upon Muriel.'

"I was surprised by the way in which he spoke, because I fancied he had always been extremely fond of the Marshes; when he was a mere boy, he had spent many a day at Merrivale, and no doubt it was on one such occasion that he and Allan took your mother on the donkey across Hilford Downs, just as she told you; but, as I have said, Henry's whole temperament was opposed to the Squire's methods of

life. He was impetuous enough, as I have every reason to know, and, I believe, very deep in feeling; but while he was ready enough to be generous in the right way, extravagance appeared to him little less than sinful, and it was impossible for him to understand how any right-minded man could spend money when he was like the Squire, up to his ears in debt. The marriage, however, took place, and Harry, as we then called your step-uncle, came into your grandfather's family with a sort of boyish determination to set business matters straight, and, above all things, to turn Allan into a business man. Allan was really, I have always felt confident, the soul of honor, but he had no natural aptitude for any of the duties or employments which Harry regarded as vital in life, and from the very start your mother, who was then but little over sixteen, seemed to regard her step-brother as unnecessarily severe, although I am certain that at heart each appreciated the other's good qualities and loved each other very truly. But Henry was galled by the fact that the Merrivale household knew nothing of the discipline of life—that the young people seemed bent only on enjoying the freedom which their growing years and the fact that the Squire had more money at his command gave, while even in Allan's popularity in the county the older brother seemed to see coming danger and strove in every way to make Allan appreciate the necessity of entering some useful business or learning some profession whereby he might earn his living. Finding it hard work to impress any of these ideas upon the gay, light-hearted, sunny-tempered young man, Harry started off to London, where he set up a

studio for himself, working unceasingly at the art which he had then decided to make his profession."

My hands clasping Miss Bayard's, involuntarily closed tighter upon it, for it flashed upon my mind that my newly found uncle, Sir Henry Paulding, might have been the artist who figured in my mind so exasperatingly in the work-box story, but I said nothing, and Miss Bayard continued, after a slight pause,

"Allan, who was always good-humored and charming in manner, laughed at Henry for his attention to work ; but I firmly believe that the older brother resolved to set Allan an example by his perseverance, and although he had not any very special talent for his work, certainly no genius, he became fairly successful. The question of the Paulding inheritance was then so remote that it never arose in any discussion as to the future of the family, Henry's only moneyed interest being the bank at Hilford. Domestic matters at Merrivale were none too pleasant, I fancy ; for, although my cousin, the new Mrs. Marsh, was an excellent woman at heart, she was never satisfied with her marriage, and was, I fear, too stern in her treatment of her husband's children. It may have been for this reason that Henry, coming down to Merrivale one autumn, induced Allan to take a place in the Hilford bank, where, if he proved himself worthy, he would be sure of promotion.

"You must bear in mind, my dear, that at this time, as I said, your mother's chief happiness in life was derived from Allan's tenderness and goodness to her. Her father died, she and her step-mother were not particularly congenial,

and I have always felt that my aunt was over-harsh to the young girl ; but Allan certainly never lost an opportunity of brightening his sister's existence, and the two, I understand, planned together that as soon as he should earn enough they would start out, beginning their lives and fortunes in some of the colonies.

" Just at this time I saw very little of them. My home was then some miles from Merrivale and Hilford. I had already had some misunderstandings with Harry on the score of his sternness toward his young step-brother—misunderstandings which led, as such are apt to do among foolish young people, to others, and my attempts to set matters straight had come to nothing. Thus our positions toward each other remained, when suddenly a dreadful piece of news reached us from Hilford.

" A forged check for a large amount had been presented at the bank. The signature was accepted as that of Henry Marsh, but he at once rushed down to Hilford denying that he had ever seen the check, and it then appeared that Allan was the one who had presented it.

" Allan was not in the bank at that hour. He was found by Henry with your mother at Merrivale, planning for their departure for Australia, and later your mother insisted that he said Henry's liberality was to help this scheme—a statement that you will perceive told much against him, for Henry at once accused his brother of having forged his name. Many—or, I should say a few—of those who believed in Allan's guilt—considered what followed to be a visitation of Providence. Allan had in reality long been

threatened with paralysis, but as soon as he seemed to realize what his brother's words meant he fell at his feet in an attack such as had been dreaded, and, although he lived two weeks longer, and was at moments partially conscious, he never recovered the power of speech, and died offering no explanation of what all who knew of it—except your mother and myself—were sure was a deliberate forgery.

"Your mother tried in vain to induce Sir Henry to declare that he believed Allan innocent of the crime, and when this was impossible she withdrew from Merrivale associations and soon after married an American gentleman—your father—with whom she sailed at once for the States, and thenceforward resolutely declined any communication with her half-brother. So you see it came about that when all the important changes in the Paulding family began to take place she heard nothing of them; and as, I believe, for some years your father was in business in the far West, the intercourse grew less and less, and it was years since I had heard any thing of her, although I had no idea she was in ignorance of her half-brother's coming into the title. I need not go into all the details which separated my own family from his, but I see now, my dear—as we grow older we see things so much more simply—that self-will or an exaggeration of trifles had a great deal to do with it all. Henry Paulding is a man of inflexible will, and I am sure," said Miss Bayard, sadly, "that he considers himself in the right; and that his heart was somewhat hardened by your mother's refusal to have any communication with him or accept help from him after her brother's death. Now that

she has struggled through so many years alone, and that, as I say, time has made us wiser and perhaps simpler in our ideas of things, I have thought that perhaps a truce might be effected, and so I let you go to see Charlie Germaine at least to make an experiment. But I never thought of your meeting your uncle in this unexpected fashion."

Every thing taken together had made me feel intensely sorrowful, and I put my head down on Miss Bayard's knee and cried pitifully when she had ceased speaking. It was all in such an unhappy jumble in my mind. The accusation against the uncle whom I had never seen seemed only like a fable ; the cruel separation it might involve from my cousin Charlie : the meeting with my uncle after all I had heard in his favor and knowing that he was the one mother had called her enemy—all of these things seemed to whirl before my mental vision in a miserable sort of mist, and my tears flowed more freely even when I realized that it might be that I should see Charlie no more !

What would be said to him about it all ? I could not help thinking. Why was fate or circumstances,—why were people's dispositions so unfortunate ! But of course I felt indignant that my uncle could think so cruelly of one whom Miss Bayard and my mother loved and believed to be above reproach.

" I don't know what else to say about it, my dear," said my hostess's voice presently, and I felt her hand gently stroking my hair. " These family feuds or misunderstandings with friends are dreadful things. The estrangements they make are worse than death."

I can recall Miss Bayard's voice sounding through the dusk of the drawing-room as though I had listened to it but yesterday—nay, as though its kindly tones were upon my ears at this moment.

"Worse than death," she continued, thoughtfully, as though forgetful of my presence. "Yes, indeed, when one whom we love dies, goes from us into the hands of Christ Himself, into the tenderest of all keeping, we know that the friendship, so much to us, is safe forever—kept for us until we can renew it once again. But these worldly estrangements! Our friend leaves us for some cruel misunderstanding and goes away, and the parting is worse than any death. Somewhere we know on the face of the earth he lives: he moves, and looks, and speaks with others, but the words are not for us to hear, the face is not for us to see."

I cried again, and felt that the world which could contain such sadness was a very different place from what it had seemed to me a day or two before, when Charlie and I were such very happy friends, with no thought of family enmities to come between us. Altogether I believe it was the most sorrowful evening of my life; and long after I went to bed dear Miss Bayard came into my room to look at me and see whether I had regained any sort of composure, but I was lying in the little dimity-hung couch with my eyes fixed upon the light shining redly in Charlie's window, vowing and declaring to myself that never, never as long as I lived, would I quarrel with any one whom I loved, never let any thing like a "rift within the lute" come into what might be the harmony of my existence.

Alas! We make such vows when we are young, and I was young to experience suddenly the result of the trouble which had come through estrangements and misunderstandings in my mother's life. All that I felt was the consequence of my uncle's severity and my mother's outraged feelings, and the knowledge—more actual than it all—that Charlie was my dearest friend.

CHAPTER XXV.

ANNIE ROSS.

I AROSE the next morning with a sad consciousness that something very pitiful had come in upon my life, and as I dressed and went down to the breakfast room, all that had happened the last day or two grew clearer to my mental vision, and I prepared myself heroically to write a long letter to my mother, but feeling certain that it would do no good, only hasten our return to America and complete the estrangement with my newly found relations and friends. Miss Bayard, after our long talk, had decided that I must wait for an answer from my mother before renewing my visits to the White House, but, lest Charlie should misunderstand it and be unhappy, as soon as my letter to Russia was despatched, I wrote him a little note, simply explaining that I would see him as soon as possible and that for the present he must understand why I stayed away. I can not express what it cost to write the words, for I firmly believed they were equivalent to a farewell.

The day passed mournfully enough, although Miss Bayard strove to interest me in every thing, and I really enjoyed going with her to call upon old Lady Dowling, who had heard of my discovery, and, with her fondness for any

novelty or excitement, made me very welcome. But it seemed hard enough for me to be among those mysterious and formerly unknown relatives of my mother; and when Lady Dowling led me to a window to the better observe what the Miss Lesleys had called my "Dowling look," I was greatly amused by her declaring me "every inch a genuine English girl," when I so prided myself on my "genuine Americanness." However, it was certainly very pleasant to be received as a welcome guest in this interesting old house, and presently Miss Ross, her lady-ship's companion, was sent for to take me out into the old Queen Anne Gardens, where her ladyship said that my mother had spent many an hour in her childish days.

I tried to fancy her as I paced up and down the trim walks with Annie Ross, who was, I found, a distant connection of the family and an exceedingly pleasant girl, although, as I suspected, rather "put upon" by Lady Dowling. I pictured the pretty, graceful little maiden whose face and figure, in the old daguerreotype Miss Bayard had shown me yesterday, were clear to my mind, the original being my dear mother when she was about my own age, and I thought of all the loneliness and misery which had darkened her young life, and, in spite of the kindness in his look and voice, I am afraid it made me steel my heart against Sir Henry. Meanwhile Annie Ross plied me with questions about America, which was the *Ultime Thule* of her ambition.

"I have a cousin out there," she explained, leading the way toward the yew walk and the pond, about which Sissy had told me the family ghost story, "and he has promised

as soon as possible to send for me. He thinks he can find me something to do in a school."

"Why," I exclaimed, with a glance at the old manor house behind us, its windows twinkling in the sunshine and its noble proportions seeming all that could be desired for a home—"why in the world do you want to go away from here? Of course America is the nicest place to live in, but to go there—a stranger—"

Annie Ross smiled a little sadly.

"You see," she said quietly, "there are so many of us at home that the older ones must begin to make their way. Of course it was very good of Lady Dowling to bring me here, but—I don't earn any thing besides my board and clothes, and I must soon be thinking of the younger ones."

"And don't you live here—I mean at Britton-Marsh?" I questioned. Accustomed as I was to American ways of thinking and working, a position of peculiar dependence and occupation like this of Annie Ross was mysterious to me.

"Oh no," she answered quickly; "my father is a clergyman near Hilford. There are eight of us, and I am next to the oldest. There is so much to be thought of when a large family has to be considered," and Annie sighed, her sweet, fair face, with something about it which reminded me of my mother, shadowed by the thought of all that might lie in the future for her young brothers and sisters and herself. But interested as I was in our talk and the chance of what might prove a pleasant friendship, I little thought of what might bring me to see the struggling household—the hard-

worked father and little band of sons and daughters she described !

If Lady Dowling had been allowed her way, she would very quickly have set matters straight between my mother and her step-brother, Sir Henry Paulding, but Miss Bayard influenced her to take no steps in the matter for the present, explaining that I had written promptly, and that within a fortnight certainly we might expect an answer to my letter.

After this eventful two days we settled down to our old routine in Miss Bayard's house, and mention was seldom made of my Uncle Paulding or of any of his family. But Martha, who had been bitterly disappointed by the disastrous ending of her plans for re-uniting the family, contrived, I discovered, to make friends with the gardener's wife at the White House in order to keep herself informed of every thing that went on there, and one night tapped at Miss Bayard's door while the hair-brushing was going on, and as soon as Jane was dismissed told us that Charlie had gone down to Mallerdean with Miss Nettleship that afternoon, the Misses Lesley and the old Admiral still being at Britton Bay and supposed to show Charlie every attention in Sir Henry's enforced absence in London.

But for a feeling that I had my mother's dignity to maintain, I verily believe I would have run off secretly to pay a visit to my poor little cousin, and I used to stand at the window thinking how lonely the pink and gray room beyond the galleried porch must look without the little figure on the sofa, and how, even at Mallerdean, the days might be slowly going by with no one but the prim Misses Lesley

to amuse or divert his thoughts from himself. I was standing thus, I remember, late one afternoon, when I saw hurrying up the road behind Miss Bayard's garden the stable-boy from my uncle's, and I felt so sure that he had some message for me that I ran down the back way and met him in the garden myself. It was just as I thought. He had a note from my poor Charlie, and I opened it then and there, regardless of the east wind blowing about me, while I read as follows :

MALLERDEAN, NOV. 20, ——.

DEAR HELEN : I miss you so dreadfully, but Uncle Harry says that you are to come when you choose. He can't ask you. I know now that you are my cousin, and I am so glad, and I wish that your mother and Uncle Harry had not had some unlucky quarrel, whatever it was. But, dear Helen, let us try to keep good friends. I am not at all as well as I used to be, and we're to go abroad for my health as soon as I'm well enough to travel. Don't forget that you promised to come and see me when you opened the box of amethysts on your birthday. *Do come.* Peter is going to take this to the White House and will bring me back your answer. Your loving cousin,

CHARLIE.

Poor boy ! My tears fell fast upon the note-paper while I stood there reading. As soon as he was well enough to travel ! Alas ! I knew from what I had heard the doctors say that poor Charlie's traveling days were over. I was not afraid they would take him abroad before I saw him once again.

I told Peter, the stable-boy, to wait a minute, and I wrote the most affectionate kind of a letter to Charlie, telling him that I supposed my mother had to feel as she did, and that of course I had to feel that way too, but that he and I must always be the best of friends, and that if we ever had any kind of a disagreement we must make it right up quickly before it grew any bigger, and, as well as I could remember her words, I wrote down what Miss Bayard had said about people separating here upon earth and losing each other so completely. It was a comfort, I suppose, to communicate with him even in this fashion ; and so I went on to tell him that I knew my mother had really loved her brother very, very much indeed, and had needed him often and often, and how much comfort he and she might have been to each other ; and I said to Charlie that even if we did not meet we could think of each other and never be any thing but the best of friends. I told him that I would think up ever so many new stories, and that if it were possible I would let him know at least when my birthday came and I had opened the box of amethysts. I signed my name, sending him my dearest, dearest love, and I am sure he must have seen the marks of my tears on the paper.

For some days after this no direct tidings from Charlie reached me, but I knew that he was very ill. Peter went back and forth occasionally between Mallerdean and the White House, and brought Martha information of my little cousin's failing strength which grieved me so that I am afraid that I was a very forlorn and useless member of the household. But Miss Bayard understood it all, and I never

can forget her quiet sympathy and kindness, nor her forbearance with the depression which I fear I did not take sufficient pains to conceal. But my pleasure may well be imagined when, returning from a walk with Martha one afternoon while Miss Bayard was in Exeter on business, I was informed that a visitor was waiting for me in the drawing-room, and hastening thither I beheld to my great delight the tall figure and sunbrowned, manly face of young Mr. Germaine.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A DISCOVERY.

I SPRANG forward to welcome him with outstretched hands and an exclamation of delight. Geoffrey greeted me no less cordially, and in a moment we were talking like old friends; but after the first remark about our newly discovered cousinship Geoffrey said that he had come directly from Charlie.

"He insisted upon my telling you, Cousin Helen," said Geoffrey in the frank, pleasant voice whose tones I had not forgotten, "that he meant to be at the White House if possible, and, if only for the day, on the 5th of July—your birthday, I believe—and you *must* bring the famous box of amethysts to show him."

We both laughed, but it was hard for me to talk of Charlie—to think of him as so ill and feel at all light-hearted.

"I promise very faithfully," I answered; "you may tell Charlie that for me, and he knows that I always keep my word if it is a possible thing."

"That will comfort the poor little chap immensely," Geoffrey said. "My cousin Sir Henry, or I ought to say your uncle, is up in London for a few days, and, as you know, Miss Nettleship is Charlie's slave, so that there will be no danger of his not having his own way on the fifth."

Geoffrey had an appointment out of Britton-Marsh, and I was sorry that he had to leave in a few moments, but detained him to define so far as he could our degree of kinship. He laughed brightly, and, sitting down at the table, took up a paper and pencil and sketched a sort of family tree, which I watched with interest as the Marshes and Germaines appeared; and finally, with a quizzical look out of his merry blue eyes, Geoff took his pencil line away across the paper to a little round spot which he declared was America, and upon which he sketched the two "exiled branches," as he called them, "Ada Marsh Glenn and daughter of the above," he said, gayly, "Amabel Helen Glenn."

"And by the way," said Geoffrey, growing serious again, "how did it happen that you never knew you were named for Miss Bayard?"

"I don't know," I answered. "You see mother rarely told me any thing of her home and I happened to be called Helen, I believe, because my father liked the name the best;" and as we were indulging in personalities I inquired what the K in his name stood for. Geoffrey laughed, and colored slightly. "King," he answered, and I exclaimed with pleasure that I now understood whence came his sobriquet at the Britton-Marsh school, for Cuthbert Bardiston had told me that in Geoffrey's day there he was known as "King Germaine." This led to a little talk of the school and Cuthbert's present ambition, Geoffrey kindling with the interest which, as a successful Britton-Marsh boy, he naturally felt in one who was trying to follow in his foot-

steps, and before he said good-by a promise had been made that he would "say a good word" for Cuthbert if he could get the chance, and there was a look of kindly resolution on his face which made me feel sure something more than the mere promise would come of it for my favorite Bertie.

Miss Bayard was detained unexpectedly in Exeter, and wrote that she would come home by way of Britton Bay; but there was no possibility of consulting her in regard to the plan I had made for my birthday, as when the eve of that festival came she had not returned, and I went to bed determined to visit Charlie as early as possible on the following morning, feeling sure that he would keep his part of our contract. Martha, to whom the box of amethysts had been intrusted, was sure to aid and abet me in any such design, so I awoke quite encouraged by the prospect before me and ran down gayly enough to the little breakfast room which only the day before, in Miss Bayard's absence, had seemed cheerless enough! It was raining in a drizzling, mournful fashion, but I cared nothing for this, and about eleven o'clock having received my precious box from Martha and been well wrapped up by her approving hands, I set forth through the gardens and across the bit of roadway to the side entrance of the White House, which I knew very well. Bryce, the young footman, admitted me, and smiled radiantly.

"Master Charles is watching for you, miss," he said, eager to take my water-proof and umbrella. "He said as how he was sure you'd come."

I was expected—wanted ! So much the better. I felt a welcome in the look of every thing about me as I hastened up the well-known staircase and down the bright corridor to Charlie's room.

His " Come in " was quick, but the little voice was weak and I was not surprised to find him on the sofa paler and thinner than ever, and, in spite of the welcome gladness of his eyes, the change in his face made his heart sink.

" I said you'd come ! " he exclaimed, joyfully. " You're like the promise-keeper in the allegory Miss Nettleship read last Sunday. There was a break-his-word, too, but it says that the promise-keeper cast a light all around when he made a promise, and it was a perfect glory when the promise was kept ! It's an awfully nice allegory."

I was on my knees beside my little cousin, and if any promise of mine could have kept the color in his cheeks or the light of earth in his eyes how gladly would I have been its keeper !

" Yes, Charlie, dear," I said, promptly, trying to be matter-of-fact lest I should cry foolishly between the pain and pleasure I was feeling, " I do try to keep my word, and so here I am ! And here are the amethysts, too. Now, then, you shall open the box first. Only be careful of the lock, dear. It's a hard key to fit in."

Charlie enjoyed this part of it immensely. He had quite the air of a master-mechanic as he fitted in the key, frowned, pursed up his lips, and then—presto ! the lid flew back. The amethysts lay shining on their couch of satin just as I had laid them away.

"Oh, aren't they beautiful! Do put them on, Helen!" exclaimed Charlie, in delight. And, leaving him the box, I took my necklace proudly enough across to the daintily draped mirror which years before had given back the pale, sweet shadow of little Muriel Germaine.

I fancy I can see it all now. Myself as I stood there! So unlike Muriel, for my round smiling face was the picture of good health, and I recall it, as it was reflected to me with smiling eyes and lips above the shining necklace, the better because the events of the next five minutes impressed every thing about me indelibly on my mind.

Charlie, interested by the box and proud of his success with the lock, had been fumbling it over, turning it upside down, shaking it, etc., as any boy, as interested in curious mechanism as he was, would be sure to do. Suddenly an exclamation of alarm and yet delight reached me from the sofa. I turned and saw, as I supposed, fragments of the box on Charlie's knees, and with them some pieces of paper.

"Helen!" he exclaimed, "look here. There must have been a secret drawer, and I pressed the spring."

I flew across the room, you may be sure, gathering the papers together, and as I did so saw here and there on the faded leaves, with other bits of writing, the name of "Henry Marsh" over and again, and in quite another hand "Allan Marsh," but part of the writing, it was very evident, was a letter, and while we tremblingly examined it, not venturing to read the contents, but both of us in a state of bewilderment and alarm, I saw that it began,

"*My dear Harry.*"

"O, Charlie!" I exclaimed, starting up and feeling bewildered and frightened together. "These papers have lain there a long time, and I am sure—I am sure Miss Bayard knew nothing of them, for she never said there was any secret drawer in the box."

"Helen," Charlie said, "look; it was just a little sliding drawer underneath, and you would never guess that it was there. The enamel-work pattern went on just the same."

I don't know how I received a sort of impression suddenly that this must have something to do with the dreadful blight—the forgery of long ago which had separated my mother and her brother Henry. At all events I felt certain that the first and best thing to do was to take them at once to Miss Bayard, and, not wishing to excite Charlie, I begged him to keep still, saying that if the letters or papers proved of any consequence I would come back the next day and let him know.

It may have been as well that the excitement of all this absorbed me out of my sadness over bidding Charlie good-by, but I was not prepared for the state of consternation into which it flung Martha when I returned through the gardens to Little Britton House holding my now wonderful box with its newly-discovered treasure carefully wrapped in my water-proof, forgetful that my head and shoulders were being drenched by what was now a heavy storm.

I felt as though I could not rush fast enough to Martha's room, where I found her busy over some of Miss Bayard's mending, holding up in the light the linen into which she

was preparing to insert one of her exquisite patches, and yet how trifling such occupation seemed to me in view of what I had to tell her.

"Oh Martha," I cried out, dropping my box upon the table, which made her start and look at me over her spectacles in some surprise. "What do you think I have found! A secret drawer in the box—papers—Uncle Allan's name and a letter—"

I could not speak coherently, so eager was I to state the facts, but Martha quickly let her work fall and took the papers in her hands without a word, while I stood trembling and anxious, you may believe, wondering what her opinion might be, since, of course, as I was well aware, Martha knew the family history thoroughly.

What seemed to me an interminable time elapsed before she spoke, but her face in the window showed how profoundly interested and surprised this discovery made her, and she turned at last, looking at me with eyes full of tears.

"I hope I haven't done wrong, Miss Helen," she said in trembling tones. "I just read on without thinking, but this letter is meant for Sir Henry, and oh, I don't know however your mother will bear with such good news, for I do believe Miss, there is something in this that will set poor Mr. Allan's memory where it should be in the minds of those who have scorned him."

I could have screamed with delight, but I begged Martha to think out what we had better do, and it was decidedly to my satisfaction that she said:

"I think, Miss, that we ought to go at once with the box

to Britton Bay. Miss Bayard is to stop there this afternoon to see Mrs. Bardiston on her way back, and" —Martha looked at me solemnly—" it is my impression that if she sees these papers before she gets back here, she'll never rest without showing them herself to Sir Henry."

I did not need to ask any questions, so full was my mind of the importance of the mere facts which Martha suggested. I felt as though I were in a dream, while I tried to help her to make ready a small bag of traveling necessaries which she said I might need, in case Miss Bayard kept me over there ; but I am afraid I was of very little use, my whole mind was so full of the curious events of the past and the present, the missing link seeming now to be found and a prospect before us of possible family reunion, while was there not a new chance of happiness with my little Charlie ?

Martha was a person of such importance in the household that her word in Miss Bayard's absence was law, and she had only casually to anounce the fact that we were starting off to meet Miss Bayard in order to content Matthew and the maids with a reason for our departure.

The afternoon was wet and gloomy still, when we found ourselves at the Britton Bay station, and driving along the streets leading to the Berlin Bazar—but what were the elements—what were wind and rain or sunshine to us ! We were silent in our excitement, but I am sure both of us were busily occupied with thoughts that went flying into future possibilities, and it seemed really surprising when Mrs. Bardiston from behind the counter in the shop

welcomed us with ordinary greetings, enthusiastic only in their friendliness.

"Why, how glad Miss Bayard will be to see you!" she exclaimed. "Did you hear about her cold so soon?"

We said no, and Mrs. Bardiston went on.

"Why, she came down from Hilford and got such a wetting she has had to go to bed. I was so glad," added Mrs. Bardiston, in a confidential whisper, "that the admiral and the young ladies are in London for a week. I had the fires in their rooms lighted in a moment for her."

We explained that we would hasten up to see her, and let Martha go in ahead to prepare her mistress for our revelation.

I stood before the fire in the drawing-room recalling the day on which I had last been there with Sir Henry. Oh, it must be that a person such as he had seemed that day—so kind, so fine in expression, tone, and manner—would prove a friend, and teach us to forget that he had ever been an enemy.

Miss Bayard's voice sounded from the other room, and I started, hastening in to her.

She was looking very pale and tired on her pillows, but her eyes were glistening and she held her hands out joyfully.

"Helen, I believe the mystery is cleared. Now, little woman," she said, smiling proudly and lovingly into my face, "do you think you can find your way without me to Mallerdean? There is not an hour to lose!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

MALLERDEAN AGAIN.

MISS BAYARD went very slightly into detail about our discovery.

"I believe, Helen," she said, as though every utterance on the subject, joyful though we might feel, had a sort of solemnity, "I really believe that this letter was written by your uncle Allan to his step-brother about the time that the note was forged, and it may serve to unravel the mystery connected with the crime. There seems to be no doubt, as I remember all the circumstances, that Allan Marsh indorsed the check and drew the money, but it was evidently given him by another party, who no doubt was the forger."

Miss Bayard, after a little further reflection, said that the motives, the details, Sir Henry doubtless could determine best, and as he was so soon to leave for Italy, perhaps this very week, she thought it best for me to hasten to Mallerdean at once.

I listened, as may well be imagined, with the most intense interest and in a condition of suppressed excitement. Martha handed her mistress her writing desk, and with some

agitation she wrote a letter to my uncle. I did not know then, what she told me later, that it was the first time in seventeen years she had held any direct communication with him, but I am sure the letter was simple, kind, and friendly, and that all the foolish, self-willed, or arrogant fancies of youth were forgotten as she wrote.

I longed to see Sissy, but she was absent in the town on some business for the shop, and so, while Susan darted out to order a cab I drank a cup of tea in the drawing-room before starting on my errand, and begged Martha to explain to Sissy in my absence what had taken me to Mallerdean in this bewildering fashion. Then, through the wind and rain, in the very stormiest twilight it seemed to me that I had ever known, I found myself driving along the shore road, where the lights were already twinkling on the wet pavements and the beacon way out on the pier was casting a ruddy beam upon the wind-lashed waters, but in my heart was a feeling of such exultant happiness that I minded nothing, cared for nothing, but the fact that I was bringing good news to Mallerdean and to my mother's enemy.

The woman at the Lodge came out, gazing into the carriage with some surprise, as she answered my inquiry as to whether "my uncle, Sir Henry Paulding, was at home." And I could not help leaning forward for a glimpse of her cheerful kitchen, wondering if I might not a little later be familiar with its every detail, a delightful consciousness that mother and I were really to be among our kinsfolk, although in what seemed a foreign country, making every sight and sound at Mallerdean now seem homelike.

I alighted at the main entrance of the house, where Miss Bayard's card and letter and my own name were taken to Sir Henry by a very pompous looking man-servant, who ushered me into a sort of morning-room at the lower end of the fine old hall. The atmosphere of perfect luxury, warmth, and stillness seemed to quiet my nervous or excited condition of mind even better than the elements of congratulation which I would have encountered had the Bardistons known my story. I seated myself before the recently lighted wood fire, glad of the few moments of waiting, during which I had time to look about what was a charming room with its candlelight and soft glow from the fire shining on damask draperies, ormulu tables, plush and satin chairs and some fine water-color drawings, before the servant returned, obsequiously civil this time, as he requested me at once to follow him to Sir Henry's study.

We went up the first half of the main staircase. There a short landing led down a corridor to a room in the gallery, whose door was widely opened, and where, amid much that was solidly comfortable but by no means luxurious, Sir Henry Paulding was standing, evidently on the keen watch for my coming.

His face—especially the dark eyes—lighted quickly as I entered.

"My dear little girl!" he exclaimed, "I am delighted to see you! Are you wet? No. Oh, you drove of course."

He drew me to a chair before the wood fire and looked down at me approvingly—kindly—just as the uncle Charlie

had talked so much about ought to look at one of his younger kinsfolk.

Miss Bayard's letter had of course explained that I brought with me papers of importance found in the old jewel case, and these I handed him, box and all, upon which he sat down at a table in the center of the room where he pored over the letter and the fragments of paper in a silence that seemed to make every thing about us hushed and still.

"This is wonderful indeed!" he exclaimed suddenly, and lifting a face eagerly intense in its expression to my anxious gaze. "It was quite right for Miss Bayard to send you to me at once, Helen." He had begun to pace the room thoughtfully, but turned at this. "Helen, I suppose she has told you the whole story?"

I answered yes, and he continued, "Heaven knows I never wanted to believe that thing about Allan, but the proof was so conclusive! A short time before the forged check was presented Allan had come to me in London to ask for money wherewith to take your mother and himself to Australia. He had some plan for making a fortune there, but I opposed it, thinking it would be better for him to remain at his post a little longer. He was terribly cut up about it and left me almost in anger. Then came the check! There was no doubt but that Allan had drawn the money, and of course I believed the temptation to forge my name, leave for Australia, whence he might hope to return the money to me later, had been too great for the young man to resist. In my arrogance I almost thought that God struck him down as

a punishment before he had time to be forgiven. How is it we are so bold in our youth; so prone to believe the very worst! These papers (Sir Henry had them in his hand), will help me in my search for the real forger, but Allan's letter convinces me that he had no part in the crime. He writes to say that he strongly suspects some one at the bank of attempting to forge my name, having come upon certain bits of paper with his name and mine cleverly forged upon them, the work—he was sure—of the man he was watching for other reasons. These are the papers you found in the box. They are evidently the work of an apprentice at the business, who was trying his hand. Some dates are scribbled down, some bits of memoranda which will help me. I think I know who the man was. Allan owed him a considerable sum of money, and if this man forged that check, as I believe he did, there is no doubt it was done with a view to Allan's paying him what he owed before he left for Australia, and the guilty man doubtless intended putting the blame entirely upon my poor brother, well knowing that I was more than inclined at any time to think the worst of him. To a man who would forge another's name a lie more or less would make no difference."

Sir Henry sat down at his table and, leaning his head upon his hand, turned the pages of his brother's letter over with mournful tenderness.

"I can't understand how it all came to be in this box," he exclaimed. He paused, and then said suddenly: "Ha! if I am not mistaken the box, with some other valuable jewels in it, was often kept in the bank in those days. It

may have been that my brother was writing the letter at his desk and slipped it, unfinished, and these proofs of the man's guilt into the drawer for safe-keeping."

I listened, fascinated by these sensational developments of the story, while again my uncle, as it seemed natural to call him, was absorbed in thinking out the rest of the problem.

"Your mother," Sir Henry said, suddenly lifting his dark eyes from the letter, "where is she?"

"I had a line last night," I answered, "saying that she had started from St. Petersburg with her pupils and their father, but the journey would have to be a slow one on Stella Hill's account. However, she told me to address her to Paris on the 11th. I wrote her all about—meeting you, Sir Henry," I added smiling, "but you see she had started before there was time for my letter to be delivered. However, I suppose it will be forwarded."

Sir Henry was looking at me, smiling, evidently enjoying some of his own reflections.

"What do you say, little girl," he said, "to meeting your mother with me in Paris, or at least to paving the way for—" his eyes twinkled—"for a meeting with—her enemy!"

I laughed gleefully.

"Oh Sir Henry," I exclaimed, "how delightful, but Charlie—"

"Charlie will do well enough for a day or two," answered Sir Henry, "and by the way, Helen, don't you think Uncle Henry sounds the pleasantest? Dr. Gay said yesterday

that Charlie would be better off here for another month, at least. This will give me time to arrange matters with your mother."

We were silent for a moment. Then Sir Henry said, as if suddenly remembering the fact, "I suppose you will want to go back to Miss Bayard to-night; she is ill, you say? Too ill to see me? Well, never mind; I will hope to meet her very soon. Heigh-ho! I wonder if she ever remembers that she was rather given to forgetting her appointments with me when I was an humble portrait painter?"

"Oh, that is in the work-box story," I exclaimed, delighted; "I was sure you were the one! Were you not the artist, Uncle Henry, to whose studio Miss Bayard was going one day when something happened? Weren't you the one friend she thought more of than any body in the world?"

My uncle looked at me intently.

"That is a great deal to say of any one," he answered hurriedly, but added presently, "When Charlie told me that story I recognized myself as its hero. But then all of that is a long time ago."

We were silent for a moment, and then I rose, saying that perhaps I had better return to Miss Bayard.

"Yes, she will be anxious, of course," said Sir Henry, who had been somewhat absent-minded for a moment. He touched the bell and, when the servant appeared, desired him to summon the housekeeper, Mrs. Dewby.

She looked surprised on seeing me in the study, but lis-

tened with respectful attention to what her master had to say.

"This is my niece, Miss Glenn, Mrs. Dewby," said Sir Henry quietly; "she will be going to Paris with me in a few days, but meanwhile it may be that she will stay over night at Mallerdean, and I would like you to see that the blue suite of rooms in the west wing are made ready with every possible comfort." And I suppose he looked from Mrs. Dewby's smiling, pleasant countenance to my no less interested one, and back again to the housekeeper. "I suppose you have some one in the house who could wait upon Miss Glenn?"

"Oh, certainly, Sir Henry," returned Mrs. Dewby with alacrity, "every thing shall be done just as Miss Glenn would wish," and, evidently well pleased with her commission, the housekeeper departed, casting a smiling glance upon me, which I returned, wondering if she recognized in me her visitor of the memorable June day!

My uncle himself placed me in the carriage, and it was with a very happy if tumultuous heart, I assure you, that I returned to the Berlin Bazar, to Miss Bayard, and the Bardistons.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

COUNCIL.

I FOUND the household in a suppressed state of anxiety and expectation. Miss Bayard, who had a sincere liking for the Bardistons, and genuine respect for them since their new venture in life, had told enough of the story to Sissy and her mother to make them full of excitement when I returned. Sissy met me in the hall, but, simultaneously with her appearance, the sitting-room door opened, and little Susan came forward to say that supper was prepared. Every possible token of good humor and attention was shown on Mrs. Bardiston's part, although — I am almost sure that I am right—Sissy's eyes looked as though she had been crying. But if this were the case, her friendliness was none the less apparent. I felt that I must go directly to Miss Bayard, but I lingered a moment on the staircase to whisper to Sissy, while she had her hand on mine, that nothing would ever need to make any difference between us. But she said mournfully, "Oh, you don't know English ways," and I felt heavy-hearted for the first time since learning of my good fortune.

Miss Bayard, wearing a soft, pale-blue dressing-gown, in which I always thought she looked so young and pretty, and like the water-colored picture I had seen of her girl-

hood, was waiting for me on the sofa up-stairs, and the first thing I did was to fling myself on my knees beside her, throw my arms about her neck, and, embracing her fervently, I exclaimed in broken sentences, half laughing and crying together,

"Oh, Miss Bayard! he is so lovely, so kind—oh, it was all so beautiful—and I am so, *so* happy!"

"So it was all right, Helen dear!" said my friend, in a voice tremulous with excitement. It held some sweet vibration, some new cadence, and when I lifted my face and looked at her, I saw that her eyes were shining, and the soft oval of her cheeks flushed pink like a girl's. Suddenly I seemed to realize that Miss Bayard to-day was far lovelier than the proud and smiling girl of eighteen years ago, whose picture had held a first place in my fancy. "Now give me every detail." She clasped her hands behind her head on the pillow, and prepared to listen, while I told her every thing about my visit, repeating as clearly as possible and as accurately all that my uncle had said, and dwelling with every sentence upon what I considered the charm and kindness of his manner. She laughed and took in very good part what I had to tell about my speaking of the work-box story. But in a moment she said casually that, after all, time ought to count for very little in a separation where people really had reason to respect each other.

"You must want your supper now, dear," Miss Bayard said, after the brief silence which followed her last remark, "and I think, as I have had mine, the Bardistons will feel it particularly friendly in you to join them. We must be

careful not to hurt their feelings, for I am sure they are excellent people, and their interest in you is genuine."

I waited to tell her of their kindness to the little Goodwins, and Miss Bayard said it was just like them, and she was all the better pleased to think she had it in her power to further their advancement now.

I ran down stairs and presented my smiling countenance in the little sitting-room, where I was eagerly welcomed, and I sat down as usual between Sissy and Cuthbert while I rallied the former on the fact that her romantic prophecies were likely to come true.

"And who knows, Sissy dear," I said, slipping my arm around her waist, and trying to chase the pathos out of her sweet dark eyes, "you may have a romance of your own yet, and it will suit you far better than me, for you know, Mrs. Bardiston, Sissy has always declared I was disagreeably practical."

But Cuthbert and I had all the fun over this suggestion to ourselves, the subject being of too solemn importance to Mrs. Bardiston and Sissy to treat so lightly; and while I rattled on and Bertie declared that we should run a race in life and see whether he wrote his great novel first or I became a duchess, Mrs. Bardiston was regarding me with mental calculations, no doubt, as to how soon I would be presented to the county as Sir Henry Paulding's niece—perhaps heiress—and Sissy, I feel sure, was estimating the awful social distance between the Manor House of Mallerdean and the Berlin Bazar. A gleam of comfort came to Sissy, however, when I whispered to her that I wished that

she could bring her cot into my room for the night, and, promising to be up there as soon as I was dismissed by Miss Bayard, I returned to the drawing-room, where I found my "Cousin Amabel," as I had lately learned to call her, very much excited over a new idea which had occurred to her mind.

"Helen," she said eagerly, and motioning me to her side, as soon as I re-entered the room, "I know that until your Uncle Allan's memory is fully cleared—his name vindicated before all the Hilford people who remember him long ago—nothing will make your mother at rest in England, and I have been turning it over and over in my mind, trying to think who could help us to trace out the real criminal—not perhaps to hunt him down, but to at least obtain certain facts in detail whereby Allan's innocence can be proven. Old Mr. Vail at Hilford knew every body in or about the bank at that time. He is a shrewd lawyer and, with the proofs we have, I feel sure his advice would be worth taking. We have a few days before your mother can arrive in Paris, and I am going to suggest to Sir Henry that you and I run up to Hilford while he is settling about Charlie, and at least find out what Mr. Vail has to say."

It appeared as though every step in this affair was accompanied by some agreeable novelty. Nothing could have suited me better than such a visit as Miss Bayard proposed, and before going to my room she wrote a few lines to Sir Henry, which I was to see dispatched to Mallerdean early the next morning, for, if she felt at all able,

Cousin Amabel said we would start for Hilford the following afternoon.

I am afraid Sissy and I did not prepare for any excitement of the next day in a very sensible manner, for we laid awake until long after midnight, talking to each other in the darkness from our separate cots, Sissy's good spirits having quite returned by this time; and even after she was sound asleep I went on thinking and planning for the future, while the rain beat in torrents against the window panes, and I could fancy the park and brilliant flower garden of Mallerdean drenched under the storm. But, oh, what homelike warmth and good cheer as well as splendor were contained within the walls of Sir Henry's and my little Charlie's home! What pleasure I would find in roaming at my leisure through the grand old house. Perhaps when I went again my cousin Geoffrey would be there, and I fell asleep fancying the happiness of a long summer afternoon in the fascinating picture gallery with Geoffrey Germaine and Charlie to tell me all its story.

CHAPTER XXIX.

I BECOME IMPORTANT.

SIR HENRY answered the note in person. Cousin Amabel and I had breakfasted and were discussing the time-table and our best train when Susan appeared to say that Sir Henry Paulding was in the parlor below waiting to hear whether Miss Bayard could receive him. She rose, remained silent for a moment, while she swept away the papers on the table before which we had been sitting, and then bade me go and bring my uncle to her.

The same kindly look of satisfaction which had welcomed me the day before came into his face as I entered Mrs. Bardiston's parlor, and in a few moments we had both reached the drawing-room, and after that foolish, useless estrangement of seventeen years, based on what now seemed to both the merest trifles, the two old friends met again, clasped hands, and looked at each other for an instant in wistful silence, while I, from my side of the room, wondered whether they found much change in each other; whether for instance Uncle Henry missed the fire and brilliancy of the beautiful girl he had known, or if to Cousin Amabel's eyes he seemed less of a hero than in the days when she had known him first and the events of the work-

box story taken place ! But whatever they were thinking of each other in that first moment of greeting very little was said to indicate their sentiments. When my uncle, accepting the chair offered him, said, regarding her intently,

"It seems like yesterday, Amy, that you and I were in Hilford together," Cousin Amabel smiled and answered,

"Yesterday seems very near to us as we grow older—but time flies as it did not in our youth."

And after another little silence they both became absorbed in the question of the Hilford visit, and to my great satisfaction Uncle Henry fully approved the idea of our seeing Mr. Vail at once.

"I have brought the box back with me on purpose," he said, "and should you need me there you have only to send word and I will come at once."

The details being decided upon, Uncle Henry said in his kindest manner that he wanted to say a few words on business to Miss Bayard, and I, of course, left the room, but later knew that the "business" was my insignificant self. It appears that he impressed Cousin Amy with the fact that he felt he had a right to consider himself my guardian, and told her that he would take the responsibilty of so regarding me, until my mother returned. He wanted me to feel from the outset that I was "Miss Glenn of Mallerdean," and I do not doubt that his motive in pushing me so hurriedly into such a position was a feeling that my mother would not interfere with what she found was making me and those who loved me happy when she and I were once more together. So it was arranged that I should start from

Britton Bay, with a certain degree of conventional elegance, Uncle Henry wishing it also to be clearly understood that on my return I should be prepared to go to Paris with him, taking a maid of my own, and remaining at Mallerdean the day before our journey.

When all of this was communicated to me, I am afraid the idea of so much ceremony rather dashed my spirits, but Cousin Amy, who had a faculty for making every thing seem pleasant, offered an agreeable suggestion. Mrs. Bardiston, to whom I had repeated the interview between my uncle and Mrs. Dewby, had already seen Miss Bayard, to petition that little Susan be "tried" for the maid's place, this being, Mrs. Bardiston declared, just what the girl was really suited for, and it would be a great help to her, as they found it necessary to keep a middle-aged servant, to whom much of the household duty could be intrusted. The prospect of having Susan about me was by no means unwelcome; she could never be formidable, and was always bright, tidy, and cheerful; so Miss Bayard suggested that she should accompany us to Hilford, where she would "fall into the way," Cousin Amy said, of "waiting on me."

I laughed heartily.

"Indeed, Cousin Amy," I declared, "it is I who will have to fall into the way of being waited on," a remark which, when I repeated it to Sissy, was immediately silenced, she considering it was only "right and proper" that I should travel as befitted my station.

But what was much more to the purpose was that I traveled as befitted my heart and inclination. What a

delightful journey that was! How each point in the landscape we flitted past recalled to my mind the first time I had seen it—the pale-hued spring day when I had journeyed to Britton-Marsh, feeling like some strange semblance of my real self—some unfamiliar girl I might have read about, who was stepping into an unknown region of dream or fairy-land. But now all was real, all tangible, and all—or nearly all—happy. Sitting opposite my Cousin Amy I gazed first at the flying country, with its rich hues of mid-summer and its many diversities, then back I brought my glance to the beautiful quiet face of my newly found, but so dearly loved cousin, and I felt myself justified by all that had happened in feeling sure that the sequel would be all that even mother could desire.

The summer dusk had gathered into close shadows by the time we reached Hilford, and drove to the George Inn, an ancient hostelry on the High Street, famous, as I have since learned, for its old hallway, oaken staircase, and vaulted cellar, relics of medieval times, when this portion of "The George" was a monastery. Susan was the only excited one of the party by this time, but Sissy, I am sure, had impressed her with an idea that calm of expression and repose of manner were essentials in the well-bred lady's maid; for as soon as she caught my eye and smiling glance she tried to appear very self-possessed, and look as though she was thoroughly accustomed to travel, instead of being positively frightened by journeying for the first time more than five miles from home! But Cousin Amy, in a gentle way peculiar to herself, made my little hand-maiden profit

at once by even this experience, showing her how to direct the porter in regard to our luggage; and when we were established in a charmingly quaint suite of rooms fronting the old street of the town, oak paneled and otherwise bearing mute testimony to their original purpose, she quietly directed Susan how to unpack my portmanteau and arrange things, also how to ring for the hotel servant and order a cab to take us to Mr. Vail's.

"Thank you so kindly, ma'am," Susan said, as she followed us to the carriage with some wraps which Cousin Amy thought we might need. "I am sure I will try to get on when you're so good to me;" and as we drove away Cousin Amy smiled at me and said she felt certain that Susan would turn out a real comfort to me. Only yesterday, after nearly twenty years, I recalled this evening to Susan's mind, and she said, with a blush of pleasure in the recollection, "She taught me in the best way what has lasted me ever since;" and I may add that I never feel conscious of my faithful maid's good qualities and loyal service without a similar reflection and a sense of gratitude to my Cousin Amy.

A messenger had been dispatched from the hotel to apprise Mr. and Miss Vail of our coming, and we were welcomed cordially by the brother and sister, dear old Miss Vail embracing me warmly and whispering great satisfaction in the way things were turning out; and while Cousin Amy and the kind-hearted lawyer had a confidential talk in his study over the important question which we had come here to try and decide, Miss Vail and I sat together

in the cozy little drawing-room, both of us enjoying heartily the history of all that had occurred since the memorable day upon which I had set forth to Britton-Marsh. The dear little old lady was startled, interested, taken out of her usual placid every-day life in a way which thrilled and excited her and, as she declared, "made her feel really young again."

"I thought all such romances belonged only to novels or the stage, my dear Helen," said Miss Vail, a delicate color rising upon her fair old cheeks, which had the look of an old-fashioned miniature about them, I always thought. "But it appears, my love, that we are bearing testimony to the fact that truth is stranger than fiction. Miss Bayard was very right—very sensible," she added, "to come at once to my brother for advice. I am sure if any one could suggest a solution to the enigma it is he."

And when in a little while Mr. Vail appeared with Cousin Amy it ensued that he had suggested something which was a most agreeable surprise to me.

If any one could assist us in our search Mr. Vail decided it would be George Ross, the hard-worked, struggling father of the sweet young girl I had met at Lady Dowling's. He had been in the bank with my Uncle Allan, and although he took orders later, having then, it was supposed by his family, the prospect of a good living, in which, however, he was disappointed, he had been a very energetic clerk in the bank, and knew thoroughly all those connected with it, when the painful event occurred which

resulted in my mother's self-imposed exile and so much family estrangement.

"The Rosses live at Merrivale, the village just beyond Squire Marsh's old place," Cousin Amy said, as we were driving back to the inn half an hour later, "and we must be up bright and early, Helen, to go over there. Mr. Ross has led so quiet a life in spite of its struggles that his memory of past events will be all the clearer, and I firmly believe he will be of real assistance in this matter."

So it was with a thankful and hopeful spirit that we bade each other good-night, looking forward to prosperity of some kind on the morrow.

CHAPTER XXX.

MERRIVALE.

THE softest of summer sunshine just stirred by a dainty little breeze made our drive to Merrivale the next morning most enjoyable, while to me every object in the country-side was of interest, for was it not the scene of my mother's childhood and growing years? and with Cousin Amy near me to point out every thing which had an association connected with my mother's past I could only gaze in eager silence first at one thing, then another: now taking in the beauty of some bit of valley land where the Wey wound like a silver thread in the distance, dividing banks flushed with the blossoms of midsummer and meadows stretching green and level with their hedge-rows like deeper lines of verdure; again enjoying the quaintness of some secluded road-way or the picturesque irregularity of a little hamlet where the thatched cottages, blooming yard-ways, and homely occupations of the people reminded me of pictures which my mother treasured in her American home,—sketches I knew later to have been from my uncle's hand. Although anxious to make me well acquainted with this part of my mother's country, Cousin Amy could not, I am sure, find herself going over the old familiar ground

without a tinge of that sort of melancholy which belongs to all retrospection, and as we entered the village of Merrivale itself she turned to me with a wistful smile, saying,

"How well I remember the first day I came here! Just as we are driving now we went then, and, although it is fully a quarter of a century ago, I can see but little change; but then the English country people are all conservative in their ideas and manners."

The village consisted of one long straggling street, bordered by cottages of varied styles, some of brick or stone, others whitewashed and thatched, while a few dwellings of more imposing air were to be seen; and there was, as usual in all English villages, a public-house with a swinging sign, an humbler tap-room, and a few shops with an animated smithy at the end of a little lane. We paused at the inn to make some inquiry for the Reverend George Ross's abode, and were directed to go up a zig-zag roadway, down the first turning to the left, where we came in view of a charming little church with a church-yard full of old tombstones, shaded by yew and willow trees, and having a walk from its lych-gate to the doorway, bordered primly by tall poplars. At any other time I would have been eager enough to explore the quaint old church and its grave-yard; but as we paused before the house indicated as Mr. Ross's I became conscious only of the fact that here we might find what would set my mother's heart once and for all at rest and bring peace to the long-estranged family.

Mr. Ross and his family occupied—on sufferance—what

was really the rectory of Merrivale church, the rector being abroad. This gentleman had placed Annie's father as curate in his parish, and considered that in giving him the house rent-free and one hundred and twenty-five pounds per annum he made a very liberal arrangement, although he was in receipt himself of an income of one thousand pounds from the church property. How the large family of healthy hearty girls and boys subsisted on this sum, how Mr. Ross and his wife contrived to keep up an appearance of gentility, and pay their way, I can not understand; but as soon as we were admitted into the drawing-room of the old-fashioned rather rambling house, set in the midst of what might have been a fine garden, I saw evidences of poverty clearly apparent, for every thing was shabby, threadbare, and worn. The carpet was patched, the furniture had evidently been mended over and again, while there was little in the room beyond what was barely necessary for the convenience of the family, or an occasional guest; and Mrs. Ross who very soon appeared, was just the anxious looking, careworn sort of woman the mother of such a family might be expected to appear. Yet it was evident that she was a perfect lady; that she had once been fair, freshly colored, and pretty like Annie, but years of a hard struggle with life and eight growing children had lined her face prematurely, streaked her hair plentifully with gray, and the hands which might have been soft and shapely in her youth were thin now and bore traces of hard work.

Mrs. Ross was very cordial, and, finding that Cousin Amy had come to see her husband on business, said she would

summon him immediately, adding with a smile that "he had his study over in the church to be away from the noise of the children."

"Then pray let me join him over there," said Cousin Amy in her gentlest manner, "and perhaps I can leave my cousin Helen Glenn with your young people, Mrs. Ross? She will have something pleasant to tell them of Annie."

So it came about that while Cousin Amy went over to the church and Mr. Ross, I was escorted up stairs to a large, shabby school room, well lighted, however, and cheerful with morning sunshine, and the voices and laughter of half a dozen young people, who rose from their chairs on our entering the room and gazed at me in silence, while Mrs. Ross introduced me as "Sir Henry Paulding's niece, Miss Glenn," and Ada, the oldest girl in the little party, stepped forward and welcomed me with a sweet manner like her sister Annie's.

It was my first experience in an English family party of their class, and when a certain feeling of shyness had worn away all around I found myself thoroughly at home, talking freely to the three boys and four girls, the oldest of whom, Ada, was perhaps twenty years of age, and who as school mistress for the little flock, and general assistant to her mother in house and parish work, was kept at home, Annie having been the first fledgling to try her wings in the outer world. Disciplined as the family had been by their struggles with life, inured from the cradle to various privations and even hardships, such as were inevitable, the Rosses were, I must say, a very contented, cheerful family; and as I

soon found, from the kind of study and reading they took as a matter of course, decidedly clever, while a certain downright simplicity and frankness, a lack of all affectation or attempt to appear other than they really were in any way, made them charming ; and I could not help contrasting their fresh, pleasant manners, their sweet young voices, and well-bred tone with some of the more "emancipated" of my young friends at home, who perhaps would have been ashamed of welcoming a stranger in such a shabby room, and dressed so poorly, but who certainly could not have treated me with sweeter cordiality or such simple-hearted kindness.

"Oh! do tell us all about Lady Dowling's house," Lionel, the oldest boy, said eagerly, and Marion, his twin sister, a curly headed girl of fifteen, added quite as earnestly, "Is it very grand and solemn? Annie wrote us that there is such a jolly ghost story told about the old pond."

I graphically recounted this weird tale, also described some of the splendors of the Deanery, recounted my last interview with Annie, and said with a blush that Miss Bayard meant to invite her to pass a few days any way at Little-Britton House. Whereupon the sisters exchanged glances of satisfaction, and Nora, a tall girl next in years to Annie, said with an air of great importance,

"Next year we are hoping that Lady Dowling will do something for me. She almost promised last summer to send me for six months to a French school, as I am to teach,"—a remark which surprised me somewhat just then, but later I learned to understand how much the English

girl who supports herself has to depend upon patronage of rich or influential friends or connections ; therefore it may be as well that there is no sentiment or false pride about accepting favors when such is the necessity of the case.

An hour passed pleasantly enough; and if in the course of that time I learned indirectly much of the care and hardships of the household, I felt also singularly drawn toward these bright young people, and, in spite of my anxiety to learn the result of Miss Bayard's interview with Mr. Ross, I was sorry when I had to wish them good-by, but Cousin Amy was all cordiality, and promised that we should soon meet again.

We drove directly to Mr. Vail's office in the Hilford High Street. How well I remembered my first visit there ! The fragments of conversation which had reached me hinting at a mystery I never thought to solve, my mother's pale, sweet face, the lawyer's wrinkled one as he looked at me while they talked, all came back with a rush of recollection ; and again that sense that the present must be a dream confused me as I found myself following Cousin Amy into the large, dingy room where Mr. Vail sat alone, rising to greet us with an eager inquiry as to the result of our visit to George Ross.

Cousin Amy had said very little as we drove back. She had much to think out; but now, seated just where I remembered my mother's figure on the first day, while I occupied a chair at the other end of the table, she gave every detail of her conversation with Annie's father, placing before Mr.

Vail some letters and papers which had a bearing on the subject in hand.

"We went over carefully all that he could remember of his bank experience," said Cousin Amy; "little by little he pieced out a connected reminiscence of the time, and by referring to certain memoranda and letters—to an old journal or diary which you see he has loaned me—recalled just who was there with him and, best of all, found these letters, written by the man whom he thinks may have had something to do with the matter. The fact, which has never been disputed, that Allan indorsed and cashed the check is still puzzling, but Mr. Ross remembers that this Paul Conway, who was an official in the bank at the time, resigned soon afterwards, and went abroad under somewhat mysterious circumstances, while some irregularities discovered later in the books, showing a defalcation of some fifteen hundred pounds, were laid to his account, although they could never absolutely prove it. These letters in the hand of an expert who could examine the fragments found in the jewel case might go far to prove that Conway had a hand in the matter, and if only he could be found Allan's memory might be vindicated once and for all. It seems so cruel, added Cousin Amy, the pink color rising to her cheek and her dark eyes kindling, "that an innocent man, though in his grave, should be remembered as a felon, and above all that Ada Glenn and her child should be banished!"

I felt the tears rising to my eyes and slipped my hand under the table to find one of Cousin Amy's, which I squeezed sympathetically as she continued,

"Mr. Ross thinks that Conway is living somewhere near the town of Blois, in France, where he is working as an engraver, which I believe was his original profession. A promise not to prosecute him or investigate any thing further in his past may, if he is found, induce him to tell the whole story."

"*If* Ross's theory is correct," said Mr. Vail, with characteristic legal caution; "we must not hope for too much; but," he added, smiling as he caught sight of Cousin Amy's scornful expression, "There certainly seems to be something in all of this," tapping the papers before him, "to build a case upon, and I would advise your putting it at once into Sir Henry's hands."

A long talk, in which various pros and cons were discussed, followed, then we returned for luncheon to The George, and after a short call upon Miss Vail, who was all excitement, interest, and sympathy with our point of view, we took the next train for Britton Bay and Uncle Henry, who had agreed to expect me (with Susan in attendance) any moment at Mallerdean.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A "STATE" VISIT.

MISS BAYARD stopped with me for half an hour at the Berlin Bazar, whence a messenger was dispatched to my uncle, who drove over at once, and while he and Cousin Amy had a confab as to the result of our Hilford investigation I sat in the shop parlor with Sissy and her mother in the summer dusk, telling them all that I could of our visit and finding that they considered the matter as good as settled, such doubts as would have affected either Sir Henry or Mr. Vail appearing to them as foolish in the extreme.

It was understood, of course, that I should return to Mallerdean with my uncle, but when the moment came, pleased and proud as Sissy was of my social advancement, she could not conceal a touch of the same despondency with which she had received the first intelligence of my good fortune; her delight may therefore be imagined when, as we were leaving, my uncle spoke to Mrs. Bardiston and Sissy very kindly, and said that the latter must "spend a day at Mallerdean on our return from Paris."

I must admit to a pang of great loneliness at bidding Cousin Amy good-by, even temporarily, and also to a feeling of

decided comfort in the fact of having Susan's familiar face and figure, and—must I confess it?—the solace of her company in my first experience at Mallerdean. She accompanied us as we drove to the manor house at about eight o'clock in the evening, sitting on the back seat of the fine carriage and regarding Sir Henry from time to time with a kind of paralyzed air of admiration and awe, while I am sure no moment of her life was ever before or afterwards so proud and happy as the one in which she found herself entering Mallerdean as maid to the person already known in the servants' hall as "our young lady."

Mrs. Dewby, followed by an obsequious footman and very civil maid servant, met us, and to the care of these personages Susan and I were for the time being consigned, Uncle Henry asking me to meet him as soon as possible in the dining-room, where dinner would be waiting, it having been delayed half an hour on my account. As well as I remember I certainly took hold of Susan's hand and squeezed it as we followed Mrs. Dewby up the magnificent staircase, across the gallery and into the first of the rooms prepared for mother and me, now to be occupied by myself alone, Susan having a bed however in my dressing-room.

I saw at once, in a flood of candlelight, that they were the charming rooms which long ago had belonged to my Cousin Muriel. The bedroom, daintily draped in Chinese silk, opened from a charming sitting-room or boudoir, which, as I have before described it, was furnished with every dainty girlish elegance, while some special articles of

comfort had been newly introduced for me, and the dressing-room on the other side of my sleeping apartment fairly bewildered me by its luxurious appointments; but all offered dazzling suggestions of a time when it might be that mother and I would have our home at Mallerdean.

"Now, what do you suppose, Miss," said Susan, in an anxious whisper, as soon as we were alone, "what do you suppose would be the first thing I ought to do? I wouldn't for a farm, Miss, have Mrs. Dewby's housemaid come up here and find out as how I had made a mistake; or it might even be, Miss," added Susan, with an apologetic blush, "that she'd take it into her head you hadn't always had your own maid by you."

This appeared very important, and while I made a hasty toilet before joining my uncle, we discussed how Susan should dispose of my modest belongings in the dressing-room, a bright idea occurring to her when she discovered that she could "turn the key of the dressing bureau on my toilet articles until she understood just how to arrange them in full view."

Mrs. Dewby's housemaid, as she called the fine-looking capped and aproned young person who had lighted my candles, soon appeared to escort "Miss Robbins," as she called Susan, to the servants' hall, while I, feeling very insignificant in the midst of so much that was spacious and splendid, made my way down to the drawing-room, where my uncle was waiting for me, and whence, with the easiest kind of good humor, he led me in to dinner.

We dined alone at a small round table laden with flowers,

silver, and glass, waited on by two solemn men-servants, who, much to my relief, left us alone at dessert, when my uncle began to talk pleasantly of our trip to Paris, saying that Charlie was as much interested, he believed, in all this as I could be, and adding, to my delight, Cousin Geoffrey would accompany us.

"I thought he might be useful," said Uncle Henry, "in showing you something of Paris, while I am employed in making a few preliminary investigations, or it may be running down for the day to Blois. Geoff has an aunt over there with whom, if necessary, I could leave you for a day or two."

All of this made me very happy and contented when about ten o'clock I bade my uncle good-night and, taking a candle from his hand, mounted the staircase once again, finding my way without difficulty to my rooms, where the events and excitement of the day had made me ready enough to fall quickly asleep, scarcely a dream disturbing my slumbers until nine o'clock the next morning, when I was awakened by Susan standing at my bedside with a breakfast tray, her face gleaming with gratification and delight as she informed me "she was getting on splendid and here was my breakfast; Mrs. Dewby thought I'd like to take it in my room, as Sir Henry had already finished his."

Susan regaled me with an account of the servants' hall, while I sipped my coffee and tasted the dainties before me.

"They keep eleven, Miss," she said, with round eyes fixed upon me; "Sir Henry's own man, such a fine gentleman, too, Miss, the two footmen and Mr. Horton the butler.

I took my dinner and my breakfast in the house-keeper's room with Mr. Horton and Sir Henry's man, Mr. Burge, he's a first cousin of the Burges in Britton-Marsh and was most sociable. All the others, you see, Miss, take their meals in the long room! Mrs. Dewby said it was very pleasant to have me, and she wondered if your mamma would bring a maid over from Russia, Miss, and if she did, whether she'd be able to speak the language."

I laughed heartily, and told Susan that I scarcely thought my mother would import any such article, and then I submitted to a certain extent to being assisted in my toilet, but I'm afraid that even to this day I have not become very fond of the sort of waiting upon which I see given in many English dressing-rooms, although my little Susan from the very first has been all attention, kindness, and care.

We were to meet Geoffrey in Paris, and at midday set off, reaching London by nightfall, where we remained over night, and then started, as I felt from the moment my face was turned Channel-wards, to meet my mother.

All the philosophizing in the world counts for nothing in the balance of light-hearted youth. When I set out on that important journey with my uncle I cast every doubt of non-success to the winds, and I verily believe that I must have worn a smile from the time we left Britton Bay until we reached Paris. I forgot my shyness and chattered like a magpie to my uncle, who was very indulgent and probably well pleased to hear the details I had to give of our life in America.

My uncle's rank, his apparent wealth, traveling with his

valet and every outward sign of high station, smoothed things wonderfully on that journey, which might have been into fairy-land, so novel and bewildering were its delights to me. We drove from the Gare du Nord in Paris straightway to the Hotel Bristol, where Geoffrey Germaine welcomed us, and my uncle, placing me in his care, set out to inquire if my mother had by any chance arrived at the address given in her last letter, when she had, of course, no idea that we would meet her. Meanwhile Geoffrey and I waited in the pretty private salon, which was part of the suite engaged by Uncle Henry, and Susan, having vanished into an adjoining apartment with my belongings, my cousin made me comfortable in a capacious easy chair, and then held forth on all the "sights" he meant to show me.

"No success," said Uncle Henry, returning while Geoff and I were in the midst of a consultation as to which public building I would take first. "I only could find that Mr. Hill's party were not expected for three days, so, my dear Helen, I will get Lady Kate Hollis to look after you for a day or two while I run down to Blois, as I do not like to waste any time."

At dinner I was told that Lady Kate was the aunt of Geoffrey Germaine, of whom Uncle Henry had spoken, and early the next day she appeared,—a large, handsome blonde woman of about thirty, whose husband was attached to the English Embassy in Paris and who was delighted, she said at once, with her mission from Sir Henry. I found as soon as my uncle had departed that it included pleasure I had not looked for. On my dressing table was a packet which

had been intrusted to Susan's care, and which, on opening, I discovered to contain a bank bill of value and a short note from the generous donor: "I have explained to Lady Kate," my uncle had written hastily in penciling, "that you want to do a great deal of shopping. You can rely on her good taste, and if the inclosed is not sufficient to cover the expense of every thing you want to buy for yourself or presents for the Bardistons I will settle with Lady K. on my return for whatever you and she choose to spend."

Lady Kate proved the most good-humored and indulgent of chaperones. I found her talking in the salon with Geoffrey when I returned from my own room, and it was evident that they had been speaking of me from the very marked way in which her ladyship turned the subject when I entered; but nothing could have been kinder or more reassuring than her manner when she discussed briefly with me of my needs, and then, telling Geoffrey laughingly that he might meet us in the Louvre near the Madonna at three o'clock, we set forth on the most delightful of shopping expeditions, driving from place to place in Lady Kate's fine carriage, I so bewildered and entertained by all that I saw that I could with difficulty keep up my part of the conversation. Lady Kate, however, considered it an opportunity for discussing my position which was too good to be thrown away. After expatiating on my uncle's loneliness and his earnest desire to renew old associations, she said that she supposed I understood what an "excellent position I would have as Miss Glenn of Mallerdean."

I smiled. "But you know, Lady Kate," I said politely, but

with much decision, "nothing of that kind can be decided yet; it is not possible to know what my mother intends to do."

Lady Kate elevated her brows and looked at me with an expression of amused incredulity, but which plainly said: "The idea of these Americans thinking of making terms with such a one as Sir Henry!" But aloud she said very quietly: "I hardly think, my love, that your mother will think of interfering with any of Sir Henry's plans." Still, as I reflected, *I* knew my mother and her ladyship, discriminating as she was, did not, and I was by no means certain that Sir Henry would have things all his own way. Of one thing I was entirely certain, and I said as much to my new friend. Whatever decision my mother came to, the fact of the splendors or state of Mallerdean would not influence her. I knew too well what were her ideas of a happy life to think that outward show or great so-called importance was of any value to one of her clear, single-minded point of view. Again the good-natured but conventional woman of the world to whom I felt my mother so much superior smiled indulgently and said, in a way that rather irritated my American spirit of independence, "We shall see, my dear. Time will tell," and as we drew up before a very fine-looking private dwelling she added: "Here we are at Gobould's. It is to be hoped that she has something stylish ready-made. You are sixteen, I believe you said, my love, and surely might begin to wear something more like a young lady. Your costume is altogether too childish."

Her manner was so sweet and kind that it was impossible

to take offense at any of her criticisms, and I was presently following Lady Kate's large figure in its rich summer toilet up a flight of marble stairs and into the first of a very gorgeous suite of rooms, where for the next hour I was in the hands of Mme. Gobould herself, who found two or three costumes for me which she declared "ravissante," and which to my eyes were charming enough for a princess, so that Lady Kate's very languid approval and her many criticisms surprised me exceedingly. The price of these dresses, and a pretty summer wrap and hat with white plumes and pink roses on a broad brim took my breath away. Yet I fancy any girl of sixteen will understand the delight with which I surveyed my figure in its new attire, a gown of pale gray China silk and crepe, fashioned as only a Parisian modiste could make it, contrasting well with the white chip hat with its rich plumes and blush roses, while a dainty little garment, what madame called a "trifle," of ribbons, lace and soft gray wool, completed this, to me, marvelous toilet, kid gloves and a parasol being added at the first shop we visited. No wonder, thought I, blushing and laughing with delight, that my Cousin Geoffrey scarcely recognized me as we kept our appointment near the famous Madonna in the Louvre, and I must confess to being highly pleased by his evident approval, while Lady Kate's comment, "You really do your name credit," was gratifying, in spite of a suggestion which I fancied reflected on my mother's good taste in matters of my dress.

Other purchases were to be made, but Geoffrey accompanied us, and Lady Kate allowed him to offer various

opinions, declaring that, "for a young man," he had uncommonly good taste, while I felt altogether too bewildered and elated to offer any suggestions. Shopping, indeed! Have I ever understood the full meaning of the term before! All manner of dainty trifles for my toilet were purchased, besides necessary articles for use, and I could fancy Susan's delight in taking care of these things, feeling no longer afraid to have Mary Burge inspect my dressing table. I determined to go off with Geoffrey, if possible, the next day for the Bardistons' presents, not caring, for some reason hard to define, to speak of them to Lady Kate Hollis.

But, for this day at least, our purchases were at last complete; and, explaining that, like many others in the diplomatic circle, she and Sir Thomas Hollis were detained in Paris late in the season, Lady Kate said that we would drive to her house for a cup of tea, and let the little girls have a chance to meet me.

I was content to follow any lead, and thoroughly enjoyed going into Lady Kate's fine house in the Champs Elysee, where, ascending a gorgeous staircase of white marble, lined on either side with pots of flowers, Geoffrey and I followed her ladyship into a beautiful salon, where every thing was light in color, rich though fanciful in design and upholsterers' work, yet for all its elegance lacking something which would have made it homelike as well as fine, and which the stateliest rooms at Mallerdean possessed.

Lady Kate bade Geoffrey ring a bell, when her ladyship desired the servant to "tell Madame Hamilton and the young ladies that she desired their presence as soon as

possible." After which, with a look at Geoffrey which was, I thought, very wistful, she said, "Try and say something encouraging to Gwendoline. I hope you will think, Geoff, that she is looking better." And a few moments later I knew what this meant, when the English governess appeared with her little charges. One of them was a spirited little girl of seven or eight, plain-looking but blooming and healthy, while the other—the oldest—the first-born and the mother's idol—a girl of twelve, was painfully, though by no means repulsively, deformed. Born with spine-disease for which there was no cure, poor Gwendoline Hollis led as sad a life of suffering and self-denial as I have ever known, and not all the wealth or luxury with which she was surrounded, not all the care and devotion lavished upon her, could alleviate a misery which must be life-long, yet which, I fancied, was harder for her mother to bear than if it had been her very own. The child's face had that spiritual sort of loveliness which we see often in deformed people; her soft golden hair fell so like a cloud of light upon her shoulders that it was with real sincerity I exclaimed in a low tone to Lady Kate, "How *lovely* she is!" And I never shall forget the look of gratitude in the poor mother's eyes, while I believe from that moment a better understanding existed between us. Geoffrey, who was evidently a prime favorite with the children as well as with their mother, was speedily in the midst of a talk with them, which resulted in peals of laughter from Gwendoline as well as little Kate, while their mother looked on approvingly; and once when, for some reason, I had detached myself from the merry

group, she said in a low tone to me, "There is no one in the world like Geoffrey Germaine! He has just the sort of nature and temperament to make every one around him happy. I only wish with all his good qualities he had a fortune. But, after all, he has talents enough, my husband often says, to make his way in the world."

But as I glanced in the direction of my cousin's tall figure and noble, spirited face, with its mingling of sweetness and strength, I felt, for what reason I can hardly say, glad that, like myself, he was facing the world without a fortune!

I made great friends with the children before I left, and then it was explained that, as Sir Henry thought it not worth my while to leave the hotel just for the day and night of his absence, Mrs. Hamilton was to return with me, and so she and I set forth under Geoffrey's escort, he declaring that the sunset hour was so lovely we must walk back to our hotel.

I have been in Paris many times since those happy summer days of which this was the first, yet the city can never possess again quite the same indefinable and brilliant charm which made it then like an enchanted country to my vision. As we walked that evening through the gay streets about which a sunset-tinted sky was shining, every one seemed to my happy eyes prosperous and beaming, and I could not fancy a thought or a care marring this universal air of satisfaction. Geoffrey dined with us, and afterwards we all sat in the balcony looking out upon the streets, above which a star-lit summer sky was throbbing, while from some

distant point we could hear the music of an open-air concert; and Geoffrey called my attention to the fact that, like the day down in Devonshire when we had met for the first time, the band was playing "Dinorah."

When I went to my room for the night it was with the dainty, tripping measure of the Shadow Waltz again in my ears; but the sight of Susan, regarding with silent admiration my new possessions which were spread out on view, recalled me to the every-day world again, and I sat up with her another hour, opening and shutting boxes, examining with childish delight the contents of each, and getting her to help me in making out a list of just the sort of presents the Bardistons would like, while I determined that those nice young people at Merrivale, and Annie Ross herself, should not be forgotten.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE RECONCILIATION.

THE next morning early brought a letter from my uncle written the night before. He was "on the track of Conway," he said, but would return the following day to meet my mother. I felt sure she would not fail in her time of coming, and so anxious had I grown to see her once again that but for Geoffrey Germaine I do not know how I would have got through that day and evening. But, after lunching with Lady Kate, he carried me off to the Louvre, where we spent the whole of the afternoon, Geoffrey helping me to understand the pictures in a way which has forever endeared them to my mind and heart; and after a walk in some delightful gardens, where I saw and laughed heartily over a marionette performance, we returned to dinner, and to spend the evening with Lady Kate and her children, Sir Thomas being hard at work at the embassy. But meanwhile Geoffrey had declared that I must have some souvenir from him of this happy day; and accordingly we visited what he said was a "pet shop of his" in the Palais Royal, where, after a long search he found a little ring which just suited me, a circlet of gold studded half way across with pearls, and which I think I will wear until my hand is at rest forever. We had another happy walk home under the

starlight, and this time I went to bed thrilled and excited over the thought of what to-morrow had in store for me, the meeting, under such strange and unexpected circumstances, with my mother.

Sir Henry arrived in due time, reaching the Hotel Bristol about two o'clock, and saying at once that he had stopped on his way from the train at the address given by my mother, and there learned that she and the Hills were expected about two o'clock.

"I left a line in your name," my uncle said, as after our luncheon we were driving through the sunny streets to my mother, "saying that she might expect you, but explaining nothing."

We were almost silent after this, each, I suppose, too occupied with our own thoughts on the same subject to make a speech possible, but suddenly,

"Here we are, Helen," said my uncle's voice at my side, and I saw that the carriage had rolled under an arched gateway, and in a moment more we were making our inquiries of the concierge, who informed us that "Madame had arrived."

My uncle returned to the carriage, telling me to go upstairs and come for him at my mother's bidding.

The Hills occupied a suite of rooms on the second story of this apartment house. Mother's plan was to leave them there as soon as she conveniently could, feeling her duty in regard to them at an end. But as I went up the wide marble steps I wondered what she would think when she heard my story, and I stood still an instant recalling the day four

months ago when she had bidden me farewell after our encounter with the uncle who seemed now to me the embodiment of every thing that was generous, noble, and true. The end of the romance seemed to have come, and I for the first time realized the consequence of events dividing that long ago August morning from to-day. How little had I supposed mother and I would meet again under these wonderful happy circumstances!

She was alone in the parlor of the rooms when I entered, and sprang forward to meet me, clasping me in her arms with a cry of joy.

"Why, my darling!" she exclaimed, "what brought you to Paris? Miss Bayard is here of course."

I shook my head, smiled through a little mist of tears, and, drawing back from my mother, said,

"No, mother dearest, not Miss Bayard—some one else—but first there is a long, happy story that I must tell you."

I don't know how it was, but in a moment I contrived to be sitting by her on the sofa with my arm about her waist and my head upon her shoulder in the old familiar fashion, and then I said very quietly, and almost with a sense that a prayer was in the undercurrent of my heart:

"Mother, you are going to be very much surprised. What would you say if I told you that every thing that was unhappy when you were young is at an end—that he—your enemy—" I smiled involuntarily as I said the meaningless and foolish word—"is here in Paris and he knows that Uncle Allan never forged that check!"

She started as through some one had dealt her a blow, but,

the ice broken, I rushed into the story while she listened, now and then drawing deep breaths of pain, or perhaps intense relief, holding me closer and closer, kissing my hair once or twice, and finally lifting my face up to look at me with eyes that were shining with happy tears.

"Oh, Helen," she said, softly, drawing me to her again. "God is so much better to us than we ever are to Him. So much better than we deserve. See how He has forgiven me my pride and resentment, and taught me mercy and love through His own."

We sat silent for a moment, happy in the consciousness of once more being together, and I feeling the delicious satisfaction of nearness to my mother's arms which nothing —nothing in the world ever can be like, and mother, thinking, no doubt, of too many and too deep things to put into words. Then I said, softly:

"But Uncle Harry, mother, he is waiting."

And mother started to her feet, bidding me go at once and bring him to her.

They said nothing for a moment when they met, these two, once so near to each other and so long divided. My uncle took my mother's hands in his and kissed her tenderly in silence, and at last she said:

"Henry, I wronged you always, I believe. Will you forgive me?"

And he answered in the simple and direct way he had:

"Ada, there is no need of any talk of forgiveness between us. We must just together clear Allan's name."

It was hard, I think, for them to talk of any thing in that

first interview but the sad event which had separated them, and the mystery which my uncle believed he would soon solve once and forever. Yet I suppose that the very best way for them to come to a satisfactory understanding was by this very means. They had parted because of this question, and it was natural that in their first hour of reunion the same subject should be revived. For myself I was satisfied enough to see them sitting together deep in confidential talk, which if, on my mother's side, it was now and then constrained, yet had enough of what was comforting and hopeful in it to make me feel that time only was required to set them back into their earliest feeling of brotherly and sisterly friendship. It appeared that Uncle Henry had found out Philip Conway's present address, which was in a remote Swiss town, and thither, taking with him one of the ablest French detectives, my uncle proposed to go as soon as he had escorted us back to England. During this part of the conversation I could not help observing that my mother's color changed once or twice, and when Uncle Henry said in his very kindest tone,

"Of course, Ada, you will not think now of returning to America,"

She rose abruptly, looked at me, and then walked over to the window, where she stood for a moment in silent agitation.

"Surely!" he exclaimed, "you can not hesitate about this; you would not leave us now after all these years."

Some hard struggle, it was evident, was going on in her mind.

"I do not know," she said in a low tone, and again looking at me. "How can I tell, Henry, what is best for me to do? I can not bring my child up in a false position! Unless I can lay by enough out of my own earnings she must support herself, and it would be so much better in every way to do this in America, where we are known and respected"—my mother's voice trembled—"and where a woman is not looked down upon for making her own way when there is need of it. No, I can not submit her to servitude here."

My mother's hand was laid upon my arm and she looked at her step-brother with eyes full of tears. He moved forward, making a gesture of disdain for what she had been saying.

"Ada, what are you thinking of!" he exclaimed, in a tone which was half angry, half amused. "Are you wild enough to suppose for an instant that such a thing could be thought of—that after finding you and feeling that my lonely house might have something cheerful and happy in it, I could let you go? Ada, for all your pride in the old days, you were never cruel or weakly obstinate. Why are you trying to be both now?"

By this time I had begun to sob quite audibly, which distressed both my mother and Sir Henry, and when my uncle said, "Helen—speak to your mother—tell her how lovingly we have treated you, and beg of her not to leave us now at least," I flung my arms about her neck and besought of her to stay a little while—to go back with me, if not to Mallerdean, to Little Britton House where Miss

Bayard was even now no doubt hourly expecting us ; and something earnest and effective I must have said about the way I loved them all, for in another moment mother was crying too, and so this point at least was gained. Before Sir Henry quitted us, arranging to send for mother and myself within an hour, it was settled that the next day Geoffrey should be our escort back to England, while my uncle started on his final investigations of the matter of the forged check.

When we were alone I knelt beside my mother's chair, and poured forth all the story of that summer time, giving details which interested, amused, and touched her. The events were so recently and vividly impressed upon my mind, the people all so interesting to me—that my word-pictures were graphic, and she laughed gayly with me now and again, enjoying, I am sure, the mere fact that the silence of years was at last broken and she was able to give me various bits of entertaining and interesting information connected with the people I had been among ; she told me that she remembered old Admiral Lesley and Lady Dowling as "very wonderful personages in her young days," while her account of the Deanery ghost was full enough to have enchanted Sissy Bardiston and kept the little Goodwins howling with terror for a week ! Even of the Bardistons she knew enough in old times to take a strong interest in every thing that concerned them, and I was delighted to find that she remembered the Rosses with peculiar affection ; but through all the conversation Miss Bayard and Charlie were our favorite subjects, and she told me much that was

beautiful to hear of Charlie's mother, the sweet young sister of Sir Henry Paulding, and "who, Helen," said my mother, "I loved like my very own. I feel sure that my letter to her from America never was delivered, or I must have had one in return, but—" my mother's hands were upon my shoulders and she gazed into my face, her blue eyes full of tender meaning—"but—let me confess it to you, little daughter—pride as well as grief kept me silent, and as years went on, and I had to struggle with poverty as well as your poor father's illness, I could not bear to write again, lest I seem to be asking a favor because of my need."

"But, mother darling," I pleaded, "now you see it is all so different! We are independent although we are poor, and yet they want us! If you could see the beautiful rooms waiting for you at Mallerdean—and do look at this frock, which I am tumbling all to pieces kneeling here on the floor. Even Lady Kate said I did credit to my name in it!"

And as I sprang to my feet to display my soft gray finery, mother said with an amused little laugh,

"Did Lady Kate say that? It sounds very like her, even as a little girl. She was old Lord Germaine's daughter, and I remember her a pretty little creature, but very conventional and prim, when Amy Bayard and I were big, romping girls, years older than little Lady Kate Brooks. That was the family name you know. Poor woman," added mother softly, "what a grief to think that her poor child should be so afflicted!"

However it had happened, our talk had certainly put my mother into the very frame of mind Uncle Henry most

desired; and when he returned at the hour named, saying that "Kate Hollis would have it we should dine with them, to my surprise she consented with cheerful alacrity, going away to make some changes in her always simple dress; and meanwhile the Hills appeared and had to be told something of the strange events which had taken place in mother's absence.

"Won't the girls all be astonished?" said Stella Hill in an excited voice to me, while her sister, with a great deal of pretty manner, was entertaining my uncle. "But there, Helen! Over and often at the school have we said that we felt sure that your mother had some romantic history. I don't know why, but she always had the air of a duchess in disguise. What do you suppose Mrs. Flower will say?" And, scarcely waiting for me to answer, Stella rattled on: "Is this Lady Kate where you are going really a relation of yours? How delightful! You must give me all the grandees' names and their titles to tell the girls when I get home."

But at this moment Sir Henry's voice was heard saying in friendly accents to Miss Hill, "We shall hope to see you and your sister at Mallerdean before you return to America," which caused Stella to close her eyes in silent joy while she pressed my hand, almost dislocating my fingers!

A moment more and we were in Uncle Henry's carriage driving rapidly in the direction of the Champs Elysees, where, as we ascended the fine staircase leading to Lady Kate's salon, it flashed across my mind how thoroughly at home in these surroundings my mother looked; and then I knew how entirely simple and above worldly considerations

her nature really was, since not once could I recall an occasion in all our close intercourse when she had ever mentioned the state or ceremonial of her old life, or showed the least regret for any thing connected with it, which of her own free will she had given up.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MY MOTHER'S SICKNESS.

IT was to be that many times in the days to come I should enjoy the hospitality of Sir Thomas and Lady Kate Hollis, but, naturally enough, nothing ever seemed to me pleasanter than that first dinner party in the Champs Elysee, with Geoffrey Germaine on the one side of me, talking in his good-humored fashion, and on the other Sir Thomas Hollis ; for it was exclusively a family party, Lady Kate saying that she knew mother would prefer it should be so. But whether in days to come I am ever tempted to tell more of the story of my youth, and so revert to the Hollis's again, I must take leave of them for the present here, since it is the events which followed this period of my life we have now to consider.

Early on the Wednesday morning we parted at the railway station from my uncle, he journeying to Switzerland, while we under Geoffrey's escort made our way back to England, not even pausing in Hilford, so great was mother's anxiety, once we had started, to reach Britton-Marsh, and to meet her old friend and cousin, Amabel Bayard.

But before we had accomplished our journey I saw that she was far from well. Indeed, her Russian experiences, Stella Hill's trying illness, as well as the intense anxiety and

care it entailed, had shaken her nerves, and the excitement following her arrival in Paris finally told upon a constitution which, I am sure, was at no time very strong. So that before we reached Britton-Marsh Geoffrey and I saw plainly that my mother was in too feverish and over-wrought a condition to complete the journey, and, terrified by a sudden fainting fit which seized her as we were nearing Britton Bay, I took all the responsibility of our leaving the train there, and with Geoffrey's tender and thoughtful help managed to convey her in a carriage as far as the Berlin Bazar. All thought of romance connected with our journey, every kind of conjecture and inquiry, which, on any other occasion, Sissy and Mrs. Bardiston would have indulged in, were merged now into the intense anxiety one and all felt for my mother. Sissy proved herself invaluable in the emergency. Almost silently she contrived to let me know that the drawing-rooms were at our disposal, and in an incredibly short space of time my dear little mother was comfortably in bed. Cuthbert had rushed off for a doctor, while Geoffrey took the next train to Britton-Marsh, and before an hour had elapsed the physician had come and gone, pronounced it a case of low nervous fever, and promised to return by the time Miss Bayard could be expected.

What was my frame of mind I need scarcely try to define. Every thought, every bright anticipation, every happy event in the past, was forgotten for the moment, swept away to the winds by the supreme anguish of that dreadful emergency; for what, I asked myself as I knelt beside her while she

slept, what was it all worth compared to her life—her so needed, so prized companionship! No ingratitude towards my new friends, I am sure, existed in my feeling, but all the cry of my heart, all the longing, was only for my mother, and I knew then that my greatest chance of happiness was bound up in her; and in that hour, whether we journeyed back to America, and I faced life as one of the toilers of the world, or whether we stayed here in happy leisure, mattered simply nothing at all if only God would spare her to me if but for a little longer.

I cried my heart out, but silently, for her sleep was restless and feverish, when I felt a soft hand on my shoulder, and looked up with a stifled cry of relief to see Cousin Amy's face bending above me. Even while she kissed me, holding me close to her heart for an instant, I whispered, "Oh, Cousin Amy—must she die? Will God take her?"

"My darling," was whispered back to me, "what can we say? We must hope always and trust—but I think He will let us save her."

I can not tell you much of the story of the days immediately following this dreadful night. I know that after the first effort to keep me away, lest the fever prove contagious, they yielded to my desire to be always near her, and I think that even in her delirium she knew me, and liked best to take what was necessary to be given her from my hand. And God was merciful—merciful, I now think, both in sparing her life and in sending that illness; for during her long convalescence, in the days when she seemed to be coming back, at it were, to life itself, many things which had

grieved her, many questions which she would have contested perhaps with my uncle, seemed to drift away, and she grew accustomed to thinking of those around her as her best friends, to watching eagerly for letters from Sir Henry, and, as it seemed, to identify herself once more with her old home and her old ties of friends and kinship.

What a day was that on which she was able for the first time to be carried out to the sofa in the drawing-room, and how proud was Geoffrey of his strong young arms, in which he lifted her slender frame as though she had been a mere baby ; and when, having placed her comfortably on the pillow Cousin Amy and I had arranged, he stooped down and kissed her as a boy of her own might have done—oh! so tenderly and with such reverence—I saw her eyes fill with tears, while Geoff turned quickly towards me and began to speak, in a hurried way, of our journey in a day or two to Britton-Marsh.

On the whole I was not ill pleased that mother had seen for herself how good and kind and sincerely affectionate they all were, and it was an especial gratification that the Bardistons had been able to prove themselves such sympathetic and attentive friends, for I had dreaded any thing like a real break with Sissy and Cuthbert, and even the little Goodwins ; but now their goodness to my mother—it was shown in ways twenty times a day that no money could have bought or paid for—had created a bond which all the splendor or conventionality of life at Mallerdean itself could not sever.

All this time I had not seen my little Charlie ; but early

one September morning Miss Nettleship appeared to announce the fact that Charlie and she were at Mallerdean, and "if only I could come up there it would be such a comfort."

Mrs. Bardiston was with my mother, and both begged that I would go to my little cousin at once; and you may well imagine that I was only too impatient to be off, knowing that my mother would need for nothing in my absence.

How delightful it seemed to be once more entering the gateway of Mallerdean—to know that Charlie was waiting for me, and that, whatever mother's ultimate decision in regard to our future, there need no longer be any thought of estrangement from my dearest cousin. So it was with a light heart and a quick step that I followed Miss Nettleship up the staircase and down the corridor to Charlie's rooms. On the sofa, in the little book or school room, he lay, waiting for me with an eager, radiant look on his little face, which flushed it so that for an instant I did not realize how worn and ill he looked.

"Charlie, Charlie!" I exclaimed softly, and putting my cheek to his kissed him so tenderly, "just think, my dearest, *our* story—the story we found out—is really better than all the rest, isn't it?"

Charlie put up his thin little hands to my face, one on each cheek after a fashion he had, and regarded me solemnly for an instant.

"I think it's all perfectly beautiful," he said, with his quaintest little look. "Martha must learn it so that once in

a while she can tell it all to us. She knows it all, doesn't she?" he added earnestly.

I answered, trying not to betray any amusement, that I was sure she knew it thoroughly, and would like nothing better, when the winter evenings grew long, than to tell it to us; and then I had to give every detail of my Paris experiences, and finally displayed the presents I had brought home for him. These were various military accouterments, with which Charlie was delighted, and while examining them he inquired whether I was not glad to have Geoffrey Germaine for a cousin.

"That seems to me one of the nicest parts of the story," said Charlie, leaning back against his pillows, a trifle tired by having pulled the little sword in and out of its scabbard several times and flourished it in the direction of an imaginary foe of England; "you see Geoff is as good as any hero. He is so splendid looking—and so strong and good. I believe he has a high temper, but you know there must be *something*."

"Oh yes," I answered laughing, "a hero without any faults would be very tiresome."

Charlie's brows drew together a little anxiously as he said,

"But Uncle Henry is a hero too—especially if he finds out who forged the check."

"Yes, indeed, Charlie," I exclaimed; "and do you know, we have every reason to think that he is coming home successful, from the letter mother received last night."

"To-morrow, isn't it?" said Charlie. "I know that Mrs.

Dewby said she was having every thing aired, and fires ready for lighting in his room."

We chatted for an hour longer, and I departed, promising to return as soon as possible for another visit, even if mother did not come at once to stay at Mallerdean. Returning on foot, for the walk was most enjoyable in this soft autumn weather, I was surprised to see Sir Henry's carriage coming rapidly along the road, but it was vacant; and on entering Mrs. Bardiston's house by way of the shop Sissy met me with the information that my uncle had arrived, and was now in the drawing-room with Miss Bayard and my mother.

"I suppose it means that you are at last going," said Sissy wistfully. "Well, I am sure, Helen, it's been a pleasure to mother and to me to have had you with us."

I answered her with some affectionate nonsense, and hastened up-stairs where, the moment I entered the drawing-room, I knew that Sir Henry was the bearer of good tidings, for he and Miss Bayard and my mother turned faces of smiling satisfaction upon me, and in a few moments I had learned the whole story.

After various delays, in which the patience of my uncle and the ingenuity of the French detective were put to every test, the man Conway was at last discovered in a Belgian watering place, living under an assumed name. No need is there for me to repeat all the circumstances which led to his confessing the details of the crime to my uncle. A promise not to prosecute him was made, and at last the true history of the case was told. It appears that, knowing

my Uncle Allan had begun to suspect him of tampering with the books, he determined to get him, as quickly as possible, out of the country, helped him to secure berths in a ship sailing for Australia on a certain day, promising, if necessary, to loan him money for the undertaking. Meanwhile Allan applied in vain to his step-brother, as we know, and, reporting his failure to Conway a few days later, was surprised by being told that my Uncle Henry had sent him privately a check for his younger brother, but about which he was requested to say nothing. Conway advised him to cash it at once, and sail by the ship which set out the next day. Allan, of course, suspected no treachery, and the intentions of the real criminal had been, as my uncle supposed, to deny any thing Allan might have said which could implicate him; and, as there were no witnesses to their conversation, this could have been easily effected. With Allan, of course, had died all suspicion of the man in this connection; but when my uncle found him he had fallen into such troubled and evil ways that he had no longer any reputation to lose, and for a certain sum of money was willing enough to sign a confession of his crime, which my uncle had caused to be published in a London and a Hilford newspaper, while the bank company had all been notified that Allan Marsh's memory at last was vindicated.*

With what a thankful, beating heart I listened to this story, holding my mother's hand tightly clasped in mine; and then Sir Henry said, smiling,

*The facts of the above case are almost literally true.

"Now, Helen, we are talking to your mother about your future. What do you say? Are you in a hurry to return to America?"

There rushed across my mind, at that moment, only the remembrance of the agony I had suffered during her illness, when it had seemed to me that the one desirable good in life was to be near her, and so I could only answer now that I loved them all most truly, but it must be "whatever mother says—whatever she wishes."

And I verily believe that, in that hour, I would have opposed her in no decision, so long as it insured our being together; but Cousin Amy settled the question, for the present at least.

"No plan, I think," she said in her sweet voice, and with her kind eyes resting on my mother's face, "no plan can be better than mine. Come to Little Britton House with me, rest there, and think it all over. You will be doing all the Ross family a favor in letting the eldest girl go out in your place to Mrs. Flower. Then, when you are quite well and strong, you will be able to come to some just decision."

And so it was settled, I think as much to my uncle's satisfaction as ours, for he seemed well pleased when the day came for our removal to Britton-Marsh, to the dear, old-fashioned house where I had learned to know and love my cousin Amy.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A MARRIAGE AT LITTLE BRITTON HOUSE.

LITTLE Britton House on a certain December morning. This is the scene which rises next to my mind. There is a flurry of snow to be seen outside of the drawing-room windows, but within every thing is indicative of good cheer and the pleasurable excitement attending some important domestic occasion. Geoff and I have been busy almost since daybreak, and are now employed putting the last touches of decoration, in the way of greens and flowers, to the old room.

"Looks fine, doesn't it?" Geoff is saying, seated on the arm of the sofa and calmly surveying his work. "When it comes your turn to be married, Helen, I'll do the same for you—unless," he adds, with a twinkle of his blue eyes, "you have concluded to take me on that occasion in a different capacity."

"Don't talk nonsense, Geoff," I say as severely as possible. "Have you observed lately how beautiful Cousin Amy is looking?" I add, and Geoffrey answers that he found all that out long ago.

Stranger events have happened, I am sure, than this, yet there will always be a touch of poetry and romance about Uncle Henry's marriage to my Cousin Amy, which on the

day in question was to take place. Every one was so more than satisfied with this result of their renewed friendship that Geoff and I would have liked to fill Little Britton House with a merry company, and conduct the affair as gayly as possible, but Cousin Amy said a "middle-aged wedding" like theirs ought to be very quiet; but when at mid-day we assembled in the little church up on the hill to witness this most solemn ceremony of two lives, I am sure that no one could have called the bride any thing but lovely, and certainly, as the whole town seemed to have remarked later, Sir Henry appeared to have grown ten years younger since the day he had come on a successful wooing to the mistress of Little Britton House. And in this wedding there was none of the melancholy which separation from other loved ones involves. Sir Henry and Lady Paulding were to take up their residence, almost at once, at Mallerdean, mother and I remaining at Little Britton House, and at Christmas time a family party, which would include many of those mentioned in my narrative, was planned in the old manor house which Sir Henry never again could call lonely or unhomelike.

So, when the last of the wedding guests had driven away, Geoff, mother, and I sitting in the firelight together, decided that no change in our little circle could have been more to our general satisfaction, and Geoff remarked, with the wisdom of twice his years, that people were so foolish ever "to marry strangers." Mother laughed gayly, looking up at the young fellow's honest face as he spoke.

"I am very certain," he continued, with a flush of color, "that, even if I had to wait as long as Cousin Henry did for

his bride I would rather feel that the woman I married had been waiting for me—my *friend* all this time."

Mother turned the subject quickly, I remember, saying that if we were to go down to the school house, where the children were to be feasted in honor of this occasion, it was time to be off ; and accordingly we started, mother, Geoff, and I, with the happy sense of companionship which, since her illness, had grown upon us. For instead of saying, as we so often used to do, "we two" will do this or that, it had come to be oftener "we three," for Geoff had never relinquished the place like a son's which she had given him in those days of convalescence over at Britton Bay.

And so, when the Christmas season of this happy year appeared, when mother was making up her mind to consent to an arrangement whereby she and I would live at Little Britton House, it was Geoffrey's pleading which really influenced her the most—Geoffrey, who declared that if we left England he would "give up the profession he had just entered upon and cast in his lot with us the other side of the pond."

Perhaps another strong influence was the fact that, in accepting what my uncle declared to be "her share of what he had realized from the purchase of my grandfather's property at Merrivale," she would be able to carry out various schemes for the benefit of others whom she loved—the Rosses, the Bardistons, who had her warmest sympathy, and some humble old friends whom she had found during a visit to the Vails, and last, but by no means least, I, her one child, would be spared a life of toil and perhaps loneliness among

strangers. But on one point she was firm. She would take only what would enable us to live simply, without ostentation, and with a fair margin for her charities. "I was no aristocrat," she would often tell me laughing, after some of Lady Dowling's or perhaps Geoffrey's compliments, "and I should not grow up considering myself a spoiled child of fortune." No, come what would, I was not to be allowed to regard myself as having any claim upon the splendor or wide social advantages of Mallerdean. And I was content enough to be known, as I had always been—as just my mother's daughter.

Perhaps there were others in our circle who planned differently, but every one respected my mother's point of view; even Martha, who remained as our housekeeper in spite of the prospect of various visits to Mallerdean, and Susan, who delighted in waiting upon my mother as well as upon myself; and Geoffrey, I well remember, assured me that "no arrangement could please him better, for I feel," he said, earnestly, "a right of way at Little Britton House which is not always the case at Mallerdean."

Three o'clock on a clear, crisp Christmas Eve saw us journeying to Mallerdean for that party, since famous in the annals of Britton Bay, for on this occasion Sir Henry Paulding determined to unite all old friends, and to extend invitations to every one who would do my mother honor as his sister, while Cousin Amy had spared no pains to make all the invited guests feel at home and happy. Even Sissy Bardiston had nothing to make her repine, for, to her great delight, she was invited to pass a day and night at Maller-

dean, when she occupied a bedroom all to herself, furnished in such a style that she declared she had to lay awake enjoying her magnificence; and a pretty evening dress, suitable and becoming, found its way from London to the Berlin Bazar, in which Sissy made her appearance at the famous party.

Early in the evening Geoff and I contrived to establish Charlie comfortably on a sofa at one end of the drawing-room, whence he could look on at the festive scene; and, brilliant and beautiful it was, Lady Paulding, to Martha's extreme delight, appearing in a ball dress which certainly rivaled the lavender brocade, while my mother, in black velvet and the pearls which she had not worn for years, looked to my eyes the most charming figure in the room. As for myself, I was too happy to care much about my costume, but it delighted me to wear the amethysts, and now and again to indulge in a remark or two with Charlie about what Martha already called "the necklace story," and which she had related with every detail to an admiring circle the night before, in which the little Goodwins were included, so that it bid fair to become one of her favorite narrations.

Late that evening—rather, should I say, towards the dawn of Christmas morning—mother and I sat alone in the firelight of her room, going over many of the events which I have related here, speculating, conjecturing as to some which seemed to lie ahead of us in the fair future; and with gratitude I realized that my mother, in "coming to her own again," had put forever from her thoughts the feeling that my uncle ever could have been her "enemy;" and if

in the future I am tempted to tell the story of the days which followed, it will be remembering with what "hearts truly grateful" we echoed the message of the angels that happy Christmas Eve, "*Peace on earth—to men good will.*"

THE END.

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